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THE COOPERATIVE ETHOS IN KNOWLEDGE CREATION

How anthropology informs cooperative economics

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1 Introduction: a cooperative methodology

Anthropology is, by definition, cooperative. The foundational principles of anthropological methodology—positionality, participation, and restitution—are inherently cooperative, emphasizing the need for ongoing reflexivity, collaboration, and reciprocity during the research process. On the other hand, the cooperative ethos reflects the attitude anthropologists demonstrate in the field by acknowledging that the researcher and their interlocutors jointly participate in knowledge creation (Darwin Holmes, 2020).

Biological anthropologists have been interested in studying cooperation as human behavior to deconstruct the myth of human beings being guided solely by self-interest or at war against each other (Kropotkin, 2021). They recognize how our species exhibits incredibly mutualistic attitudes, far more than other primates (Silk, 2009). Suggesting that it evolved from mutualistic collaboration rather than altruistic impulses, some scholars insist that human cooperation arose from interdependence for survival and procreation: cooperation as mutual aid explains human societies' unique forms of cognition, communication, and social organization (Tomasello et al., 2012).

While acknowledging the significance of these reflections, this text will refrain from delving deeper into them and instead direct attention toward economic anthropology, which has roots in the study of exchanges within non-market societies and has since expanded to recent ethnographic studies within investment banks. Positioned within the realm of heterodox approaches, the anthropology of the economy embraces the understanding that science itself is a social construct and emphasizes the political nature of economics (Wilk & Cliggett, 2007). "The anthropology of the economy explores the idea that different but possible ways of organizing economic activity can not only be imagined in theory but can be brought to fruition in historical reality" (Rakopoulos, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, studying cooperatives from an anthropological perspective concerns the failures or realizations of democratic economic systems.

The first anthropologist to challenge the flawed notion of economics as a science entirely autonomous and separable from every other disciplinary field was Marcel Mauss (2002 [1925]). Building on his theories, generations of anthropologists have criticized the "natural laws of the market"

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proposed by classical political economists, such as self-interest and the maximization of utility. In studying a particular type of non-market society, namely, gift societies, Mauss revealed that different principles, such as reciprocity, hierarchy, solidarity, and competition, simultaneously operate within any social system (Aria, 2016). By considering gift societies a hybrid concept between utilitarian calculation and pure generosity, Mauss drew a connection with cooperatives. Future scholars will use this same intuition to address cooperative organizations as a third way between the market and the state, and the cooperative economy as a domain within market-oriented societies where reciprocity persists despite the competitive environment (Polanyi, 1945; Godbout & Caillé, 2002).

In the context of cooperative economics and management (CEM), anthropology offers a qualitative analysis of both the enterprise and the community it is immersed in. Anthropologists view the cooperative as a social entity per se, with its history shaped by people influenced by social, cultural, and geographical factors (Nash & Hopkins, 1976; Vargas-Cetina, 2011). They critically examine how workers live within and outside the cooperative and the relational and intimate economies of its members (Rakopoulos, 2018; Vargas-Cetina, 2005). They analyze the tensions and disillusions between theory and praxis concerning democratic participation, political neutrality, and governance structures (Kasmir, 1996). Additionally, they study the frictions between the local sensitivities of workers and the global markets for their products (Ferry, 2003).

Instead of analyzing how anthropologists have been studying cooperatives (see Rakopoulos, 2020), I will further explore the cooperative nature of the discipline's methodology. I argue that this understanding could broaden the analysis of CEM scholars, allowing a more rounded and holistic comprehension of economic phenomena.

As a research methodology, anthropology offers valuable insights into the cooperative economy by using ethnography and participant observation to render explicit the emic[1] perspectives of the agents and their relationships with the human and non-human world. This approach provides a rich, "thick" (Geertz, 2003, p. 6) descriptive analysis of how individuals engage with each other, the researcher, and other natural agents within their community. Immersing oneself in the context of a cooperative life allows for exploring social interactions, symbolic meanings, ritualistic practices, and communication dynamics that are otherwise impossible to consider. Ethnography, as a method, goes beyond the mere collection of data; it involves the active engagement of the researcher in the lives of the people being studied over an extended period (Ingold, 2014). It builds upon the collaborative relationships that the anthropologist and their co-researchers establish in the field daily (Lassiter, 2005). This engagement encompasses observing events, listening to conversations, conducting informal and formal interviews, gathering documents and artifacts, and conducting archival work (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It is a mode of relating to others. When practiced within organizations, ethnographic sensibility allows the analysis of corporate culture as a strategic site to underpin the complexities of contemporary societies (Cefkin, 2009).

Through a brief reconstruction of Marcel Mauss's experience as the pioneering cooperative anthropologist in Europe, I show that anthropology and the cooperative movement share common roots. I draw inspiration from his life and academic career and use my ethnographic example as a decade-long participant observer in an Italian cooperative bank to show how the anthropological approach creates knowledge that is per se cooperative.[2] However, I first introduce the three critical aspects of the anthropological methodology that present a profound cooperative ethos: positionality, participation, and restitution.

2 Positionality: the tool of reflexivity

In their pursuit of understanding and interpreting the social world, anthropologists are acutely aware that complete objectivity is an elusive goal.[3] The ontological approach from the post-modernist critique suggests that anthropological epistemology is based on the practice of reciprocity and the encounter with human and non-human agents in the field (Degyansky, Chapter 29). Reality is co-constituted between anthropologists and the communities they study, and objectivity is seen as a collaborative and relational process, acknowledging multiple ontologies and perspectives (Richardson, 1993). Researchers are not detached observers but integral components of the social fabric they investigate. Within this complex dynamic, they bring their own vulnerabilities, personal stories, and experiences, all of which inevitably influence their observations and interpretations of both quantitative and qualitative data. This understanding gives rise to a practice known as positionality.

Positionality describes "an individual's worldview and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context" (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). It is unique to each researcher: some aspects are culturally ascribed as being fixed, for example, gender, class, skin color, and nationality, while others, such as political views, personal life history, and experiences, are more fluid and constantly changing. As it will impact their results, researchers should critically scrutinize and acknowledge their positions, assumptions, and biases as they engage with their chosen fields of study in a constant practice of reflexivity. A reflexive approach becomes, therefore, a necessary prerequisite and an ongoing process for the researcher to identify, construct, critique, and articulate their positionality.

Moreover, anthropologists should recognize that the people they engage with – the collaborators through which knowledge is co-created – often develop their own technical knowledge, made of empirical data, theories, and models sometimes validated even in academia. Dealing with this situated knowledge is an ordinary reality within organizational contexts, like cooperative enterprises. Scrutinizing these emic concepts poses an additional challenge for the researcher, who must critically assess these notions while simultaneously subjecting themselves to a double self-examination through the practice of reflexivity.

The anthropological distinction between etic and emic can be fecund to international business and management scholars, who have used it to distinguish elements that can be compared across cultures (Buckely et al., 2014). However, sometimes those boundaries can be very blurred. This is why CEM scholars, like anthropologists, should adopt an approach that acknowledges the inherent tensions arising from their different positionalities.

Reflexivity contributes to increasing awareness of the consequences of knowledge production among the studied community –or cooperative. Knowledge creation is not neutral; instead, it carries the potential to facilitate or hinder social change, as well as create conflicts and imbalances. Recognizing that their commitment extends beyond academic inquiry, anthropologists reflect upon how their works can impact society (Graeber, 2011; Ortner, 2016). This acknowledgment paves the way for engaged anthropology that bridges the gap between theoretical exploration and political aspirations for change. In this case, academia merges with activism, resulting in a discipline responsive to the pressing needs of the studied societies. However, reflexivity and positionality become critical in ensuring that the political stance does not surpass the ethical strive for knowledge, which is the ultimate objective of any scholar.

Familiarity with the cooperative movement or engaged as activists, CEM scholars may straddle the dual roles of researchers and practitioners or activists. With the aim to contribute to academic

discourse, the practice of constant and consistent reflexivity becomes imperative in this delicate balancing act. Navigating this tightrope requires a perpetual commitment to reflexivity and recognizing how their affiliations influence their academic work.

3 Participation: knowledge creation is always a cooperative effort

The second crucial methodological aspect is participation. Among the most debated yet fruitful concepts for other disciplines is "participant observation"—the notion of immersing oneself in the daily activities of the community under study (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Malinowski, 2004). Over time, this practice has expanded with concepts such as "performative observation" (Vargas-Cetina, 2020, p. 204) or "observant participation" (Seim, 2021, p. 3). However, at the core rests the idea that anthropology is not a passive study of people but a collaborative endeavor embodied within a community. The anthropologist becomes a participant, experiencing life and work with their co-researchers.

The assertion that anthropology is not merely a study of people but a study with people encapsulates the essence of participatory methodology (Ingold, 2008). This immersion within the environment of joint activity equips researchers with a unique vantage point through which they can perceive the world through the lens of their interlocutors. This outlook highlights the cooperative nature of anthropology, where the world at large becomes a co-researcher in the journey of knowledge acquisition. Through this participatory engagement, which implies constant negotiations in the field, anthropologists glean insights into diverse ways of seeing, hearing, and touching – an experiential understanding that transcends theoretical abstractions and exposes the researcher to their vulnerabilities (Behar, 1996).

By focusing on everyday practices in the workplace and beyond, the stories that are told, and people's behavior during meetings or informal gatherings, anthropologists can describe the processes that give meaning to an organization's life and, through their thick descriptions, render explicit what is considered implicit within the community. Looking at the micro-level of relationships, practices, and discourse has proven to be a powerful tool for conducting a broader macro-level analysis of the cooperative culture. The world does not reveal itself through formalized concepts, such as structures or symbols. Agents strive to make sense of their experiences through routines, practices, rituals, and performances. Participant observation allows researchers to access those data, helps in formulating culturally relevant questions, and enhances the accuracy of data interpretation by providing an insider's perspective: to describe a cooperative culture, one should observe those who interact with it on a daily basis.

Despite the invaluable insights gained, this immersive approach comes with challenges. Anthropologists often struggle to switch off from their research, even during personal downtime. Fieldwork is a total social activity embodied and felt by the researcher (Richardson, 1993). The boundaries between work and personal life become blurred, leading to constant data collection and analysis. This continuous engagement can be exhausting, but it also highlights the commitment and dedication required to understand and recount the lives of the studied communities. Observant participation shows the importance of being actively engaged in a cooperative to achieve a deeper understanding of the cooperative economy.

Anthropology exemplifies that knowledge-seeking requires the researcher to transform themselves in the process of engaging in the field, accept unanticipated paths, and be open to possibilities that arise while experiencing the world (Throop, 2018). The ethnographic encounter is a way to understand another being without privileging any logic but instead being open to new horizons of understanding that may emerge when different logics dynamically meet (Merleau-Ponty, 1964

in Throop, 2018). As a methodology, anthropology entails moving out of the comfortable modes in which the researcher inhabits the world by taking the parameters of alternate ontological frameworks seriously. It is an imaginative work: "Not a matter of imagining a form of experience but of experiencing a form of imagination" (Viveiros de Castro, 2013, pp. 483–484). By experiencing the other, the ethnographic encounter "enables one to critically reconsider one's view from another vantage point" (Jackson, 2013, p. 262 in Throop, 2018). It is about making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange, in all its ontological essence. This is possible only through the embodiment of the researcher into their field.

Some management scholars have recognized the benefits of participatory approaches. Participatory Action Research, for example, assumes knowledge to be a "process of joint learning" (Ottosson, 2003, p. 90), and includes "the human research subject into the design, implementation, and analysis of the research" (Pietrykowski, 2015, p. 1). Anthropologists have also been using PAR to promote solutions for and in collaboration with public organizations and institutions (Vargas-Cetina, 2020), as this method resonates with ethnographic data collection (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019). A first takeaway for CEM scholars is that, especially in cooperative economics, a critical interdisciplinary engagement would benefit research. Radically new research methods can emerge by developing a truly transdisciplinary approach that moves beyond mere juxtaposition or complementarity among disciplines. It would involve discussing each discipline's underlying assumptions and creating new common languages. At the same time, it would also provide more holistic attention to the emic voices of the interlocutors in the field. In this regard, compelling work is being carried out by some authors in this handbook who are shaping a theory of cooperative economy based on relational epistemologies and methodologies (Wieland, Chapter 1; Silva, Chapter 9; Biggiero, Chapter 20; Warren, Chapter 11). By recognizing the cooperative ethos that characterizes the relationship in the field and viewing interlocutors as co-researchers, CEM scholars acquiesce that pursuing knowledge requires researchers to transform their thinking and be receptive to unanticipated possibilities from the people engaged in the research.

4 Restitution: to give back and reciprocity in the field

One of the ethical imperatives for anthropologists is to give back to the communities that accept sharing their knowledge with them. This reciprocity builds trust between the researcher and their collaborators. This relationship is built through a dialogue of giving and taking, where scholars actively contribute to the community's well-being. This practice goes beyond anthropology and could be extended to most disciplines. Various creative methods have emerged to give back to the communities, implying prolonged involvement over an extended timeframe – such as graphic novels, music, videos,[4] as well as creating associations, teaching, and working with local institutions.

Returning to the field after research is completed involves a delicate process of communication and translation. Anthropologists often feel the urge to share results and respond to the expectations of the informants and communities. As mentioned earlier, interlocutors have become co-producers of the researchers' knowledge, but they also have their own ideas built upon experience and practice. Researchers, therefore, need to reckon with practitioners' knowledge and face it. They feel the weight of having to contend with those who experience their reality daily and may not appreciate the researcher portraying it in academic nuances. "Turning relationships into data, and placing interpretations in public can also disturb and break fieldwork relationships. It might be 'anti-social'" (Mosse, 2006, p. 937). The researcher must consider the possibility of receiving a hostile reaction to their work and should not assume that the people studied will necessarily "see the research in the same way" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 219). Therefore, generating a

cooperative spirit in the field, based on open dialogue and the recognition that any critique is meant to contribute to knowledge creation, becomes essential.

In addition to that, every author writes for an audience. In the case of cooperative anthropology, this public generally extends beyond academia and includes the cooperative members themselves. Sometimes, research can be commissioned and written for the enterprise's top management. Practitioners could benefit from the insights of the results: however, it could also generate conflicts, exacerbate tensions, and, in extreme cases, provoke harm. Acknowledging these risks, anthropologists must tread carefully when navigating these heterogeneous audiences.

A collaborative ethnography shares the authority of defining the research's target audience with the interlocutors and should aim to "deliberately and explicitly emphasize collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process," especially in the writing process (Lassiter, 2005, p. 16). More than a restitution ex-post, once the work is completed, the researcher can engage in a process of collaborative reading and interpretation of the ethnographic text in the making. Allowing co-researchers to have a say in the final manuscript is a way to share the power and authority of academic knowledge – knowledge that is situated and matters intellectually, politically, and ethically.

Ethnography encourages researchers toward activism, seeking to instigate change or impact cooperative life. Like militant anthropology, the cooperative ethos that animates ethnography may manifest as a scholarly commitment to social betterment that surpasses the boundaries of traditional academic research (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Researchers find a way to achieve restitution through their active engagement and collaboration with the communities, partnering with enterprises or other local institutions to address complex social issues and reach transformative shifts that conventional research alone cannot achieve.

Anthropology advocates for integrating the reciprocity principle into research practices, emphasizing the importance of building trust through active engagement, and acknowledging the contributions of cooperative communities. This practice could benefit CEM scholars, as the discussion on innovative knowledge-sharing methods encourages reconsidering traditional dissemination approaches, promoting significant inclusion. Acknowledging potential challenges, including conflicts, in research dissemination urges scholars to approach their fieldwork with open and continuous dialogue with interlocutors, aligning with the participatory essence of cooperatives.

5 Marcel Mauss: the first cooperative anthropologist

Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) is well known as one of the European founders of anthropology as a discipline. Not so widely known is that he was also "one of the leaders of the cooperative movement in France" (Fournier, 2006, p. 206) and was among the founding members of a consumer cooperative called la Boulangerie.[5] Apart from his extended academic research, he engaged in political writings, today recollected in the outstanding volume "Ècrits politiques" (Mauss & Fournier, 1997). This is a collection of more than 180 articles published in various journals and newspapers between 1895 and 1939, approximately one-third dedicated to cooperative organizations. If, as a scholar, he never conducted research in the field – a fact that earned him the title of "the last and the best of the 'armchair anthropologists'" (Fournier, 2006, p. 283) – his travels throughout pre-World War I Europe to inform his fellow cooperators and promote the emerging movement provide interesting ethnographic insights. This is why those specific texts on cooperatives have been deemed worthy of particular examination from an anthropological perspective (Copans, 1999).

Mauss examined cooperatives with an ethnographic attitude, conducting fieldwork at home when anthropology only considered societies far from the center of colonial empires as their object of study. In 1905, he traveled to the United Kingdom to attend the English Cooperative Congress.

On that occasion, Mauss realized that while studying the British cooperatives, he was also gleaning information about the society at large. Immersed in the context, he experienced the power of ethnographic knowledge: "I've learned more in a week about the government of things and men, and about the English and Scottish peoples,… than in ten years of reading. Now what purpose will all that serve?" (Mauss in Fournier, 2006, p. 126). Mauss embodied the cooperative ethos of an anthropologist, but he and his contemporaries lacked the framework to recognize the avant-garde nature of conducting research in their own (or close by) countries or within organizations – a practice that is now commonplace among anthropologists.

The extensive reports on Belgian, German, English, and Russian cooperatives in the Écrits present a wealth of sociological and economic data while also revealing his anthropological ethos of looking "beyond numbers" in the pursuit of "direct contact with things and personalities" (Mauss & Fournier, 1997, p. 160). As both a fervent socialist and advocate of cooperation, Mauss exhibits profound admiration for the pragmatic results obtained by cooperatives in contrast to the utopian aspirations he associated with political practices. On some occasions, he strategically employed his writings to propagandistically reinforce the connections between cooperativism and socialism. However, he insisted on the autonomous nature of cooperatives and the need for them to be separated from political parties, as he conveys in his analysis of Russian cooperatives (Mauss in Fournier, 2006, pp. 275–299).[6]

Shifting the attention to his academic coté, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (Mauss, 2002 [1925]) is undoubtedly the text that resonates most when seeking his cooperative ethos. It is crucial to recognize that the political intention behind *The Gift* was to demonstrate the existence of economic systems that did not adhere to the capitalist principles of profit maximization and self-interest (Aria, 2016). Mauss's academic fascination with gift societies comes from finding a common thread between them and the profoundly democratic society he envisioned. Mauss is quite explicit on this. He refers to cooperatives as the "economic organizations of the proletariat" (Mauss, 2002 [1932]: p. 96), positioning them as contemporary iterations of gift societies.[7] Emphasizing the cooperative model as an emergent economic order, he contends that it is already operational in specific economic groups where tasks are undertaken and services are provided for others (Mauss, 2002 [1932], pp. 99–100). Going beyond *The Gift*, in the name of his extensive study of religions and mythologies,[8] he linked the cooperative movement "to the grandiose or modest beginnings of the major religions: the spirit of sacrifice, the search for ideas and formulas, the intensity of passions" (Fournier, 2006, p. 310). Cooperativism was, in his eyes, a secular "religion of man for man" (Fournier, 2006, p. 310).

Mauss has always maintained a rigid separation between his academic career and his cooperative and activist life (Hart 2007, 2014). However, this dichotomy becomes more blurred when acknowledging the profound political implications embedded within his academic writings and practices. While it would be anachronistic to label Mauss as a militant anthropologist, referring to him as the first cooperative anthropologist implies recognizing a level of engagement in his academic journey. Not only because of his intentions of demonstrating alternative economic systems to capitalism but also as a generous teacher who embodied cooperation as a practice of sharing knowledge – and personal life – with students. At the same time, when viewed as the first cooperative anthropologist, educating fellow cooperators through his written works, we recognize the anthropological perspective embodying the notion that "the personal is political" avant la lettre.

Through both his personal and academic life, with the zeal and passion of the scholar and the cooperator, Mauss actively contributed to creating a society built on principles that diverged from capitalism. I imagine his tenacious smirk as he writes, his humble awareness of forging a society based on solidarity as a total social fact through words that have the power to become reality.

6 Doing ethnography in a cooperative bank

Informed and inspired by Mauss's work, I have conducted extensive fieldwork at a cooperative and ethical bank in Italy for almost ten years. I started as a researcher engaged in a six-month ethnography; then I became a member and eventually a volunteer, contributing to different activities. In 2022, I organized a series of interviews with employees and members in my new role as a Ph.D. student. My fluid position as both a researcher and practitioner has endowed me with the unique privilege of accessing a domain that is typically closed to outsiders. Over an extended timeframe, I have engaged in numerous formal and informal conversations with the bank's members, employees, and clients, thus enabling an in-depth exploration of the evolving narrative and historical trajectory of the cooperative. At the same time, it was a favorable environment as members who actively participated in the research process embraced the cooperative ethos of anthropology.

Reflexivity has guided me throughout my research. Among the strategic measures I have adopted in this process, I committed to refraining from making assumptions. During interviews, because of my positionality, members would often assume my familiarity with specific processes. In response, I consistently played the role of a humble, uninformed observer, asking to define and explain processes even when I was well-aware of them. This approach recalibrated the dynamics of information exchange, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the cooperative's internal mechanisms. Integral to this process are my field notes, serving to chronicle my experience and as a self-auditing and self-awareness mechanism, perpetuating the ongoing exercise of reflexivity. Furthermore, I have sought the collaboration of colleagues from different backgrounds to enrich the research through a transdisciplinary lens and provide an additional vantage point that augments my insider positionality. This cooperative dimension has fortified my research endeavors, safeguarding against the potential biases inherent in my dual role.

Participating in the bank's activities has given me an intimate understanding of the organization. Embracing ethnography as a practice that involves attending to persons and learning from them my research encompasses the lived experience of observant participation as "living attentionally with others" (Ingold, 2014, p. 389, stress added). The highly complex governance structure of the bank, for example, is also deeply entangled in informal moments of sharing and exchanges among members that would not have been picked up if not through a constant mid-term engagement. Participant observation allowed me to embody the struggles, the joys, and the emotions that members share in the bank, which are a fundamental part of the ethos that animates them.

As restitution concerns, I have volunteered in the banks' activities since the beginning of my research. I chose to engage in the service to give back to a community that has enriched my academic and personal journey. The research outcomes published in international journals contribute to the bank's standing within the academic sphere, showing the profound importance of knowledge dissemination. The engagement of the bank's members and employees in reading, discussing, and critically evaluating my research on the evolving ethics of the institution (Carabini, 2014), the polyphonic cooperative governance structure (Carabini, 2024), and the potential risk of fetishizing ethics within the bank[9] serve both as a demonstration of how informants become co-researchers as well as an exemplar of how the concept of restitution fosters new discussions while reciprocating the trust vested in knowledge creation.

7 Conclusions

The added value of anthropology in studying cooperative economics lies in the essence of its cooperative method. Positionality, participation, and restitution are relational practices that give the interlocutors a central role in the research process, making the output the result of a cooperative effort.

Ethnographic knowledge does not aim to establish an absolute truth but instead seeks to describe the researcher's unique journey toward their conclusions – a journey that cannot be undertaken alone but requires the active participation of those involved in the study. Research as a cooperative practice means that the interlocutors become co-protagonists of the knowledge production. Ethnography excels in capturing aspects that may elude quantitative analysis, such as motivations, emotions, and the underlying forces driving human and organizational actions. This nuanced understanding is made possible only through free-flowing, unstructured, and non-hierarchical interactions that occur over an extended time and where people feel they are contributing to the creation of the research.

The mere presence of the researcher, however, influences the observed context. Analogous to "Schrödinger's cat" in physics, where an observation alters the state of an entity, the anthropologist's presence affects social reality. Given the inherent challenge of overcoming this paradox, ethnographers consistently detail their role within the research context through rigorous reflexivity, engage their interlocutors in the participant observation process according to ethical principles, and give back to a community that has enriched their academic and personal journey.

When analyzing cooperative identity, principles, and values, it is crucial to acknowledge that the interpretations of these concepts are historically contingent and culturally specific. Values of cooperation, as delineated by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA),[10] such as equity, democracy, and political neutrality, should always be contextualized when studied in the field. They can vary from cooperative to cooperative within the same country and across cultures. In the last decade, the ICA cooperative identity has started facing critiques for being perceived as Western-centric and, therefore, incomplete (Molefe, Chapter 5). I situate my knowledge within this Western-centric cooperative history without the pretension of it being the only history to be told. Anthropology certainly offers the theoretical and methodological tools to shift toward decolonial epistemic perspectives and a recentering of cooperative research.

From this European perspective, however, I claim that Marcel Mauss sowed the seeds for what can become today the realm of an anthropology of cooperatives. Further research would contribute to understanding his engagement in the cooperative movement; however, he can be recognized as the first cooperative anthropologist who showed the value of looking at cooperative organizations with a critical glance. In my study of the Italian cooperative and ethical bank, I insist on the cooperative ethos embedded in the discipline. By recognizing that rigid ethics or identity may impede rather than enhance the potential for emancipatory experiments, by engaging co-researchers in knowledge creation and by reciprocating the trust received from the bank with voluntary activities, I show the cooperative methodology of anthropology in practice.

I have argued that anthropology provides a critical approach that can broaden the way research is conducted for scholars of cooperatives in general, and CEM scholars within the particular context of this Handbook. By definition, anthropology is cooperative and, ultimately, the most cooperative of the social sciences.

Notes

1 With the word *emic*, anthropologists refer to cultural practices, discourses, values, and beliefs from the perspective of those who live in the community. *Etic*, on the other hand, is an outsider's perspective, the look that an observer can have on the same community. For more: Mostowlansky, Till, and Andrea Rota. (2020) 2023. "Emic and etic". In *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Felix Stein. Online: http://doi.org/10.29164/20emicetic

2 I am aware that the choice to refer to Marcel Mauss and to an Italian cooperative bank reflects my personal trajectory from a European tradition. The history of cooperative enterprises, however, is entangled with many different philosophies around the world, all of which deserve more attention and further research, especially in anthropology. African-American history, for example, is deeply entangled with the strives

against oppression, discrimination, and White supremacy of the Black cooperative movement (Gordon Nembhard 2014). Other scholars have looked at the connection between the history of cooperatives and Confucianism in China (Bernardi 2014), the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Molefe, chapter 5), indigenous knowledge in Mexico, and labour movements in Argentina (Giovannini and Vieta, 2017).

3 Since the publication of James Clifford post-modernist ideas, anthropologists have been drawning on Husserls phenomenology and investigating around the concept of the relation between the subject and the object of research. For further insights on the post-modernist and ontological turn refer to Richardson 1993 and Throop 2018.

4 An example of restitution within the cooperative economy is AroundTheWorld.coop, where the researcher embraced a grand project to show the impact of cooperatives worldwide. For further information see www.aroundtheworld.coop

5 In 1900, along with thirty-eight members and 1.900 francs of starting capital, Mauss founded a consumer cooperative intended to cover the entire sector mainly by collective purchasing of flour and selling of "breads, pastries, cookies, and petits fou". Despite the struggle to keep it alive, the Boulangerie was liquidated in 1906 (Fournier 2006).

6 Originally published in La Revue de Paris, t. 2, 27 e année, mars-avril 1920, 96-121.

7 Chapter 4, Conclusions for economic sociology and political economy - pp. 91 - 100 (Mauss 2002)

8 Mauss was appointed President of the Section of Religious Science at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1938

9 Carabini, C. and Raffaelli, P. (in preparation) Restoring the Relational Form of Credit through Value Practices. The case of Banca Popolare Etica.

10 For the 1995 revised statement on the Cooperative Identity adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance, which contains the definition of a cooperative, the values of cooperatives, and the seven cooperative principles please refer to https://ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity

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