

# How useful is research on cooperatives? Reflection based on 3 double-cap situations

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# Introduction

**To my students : “compare what you have read with what you have experienced”**

Vigilance about excess of utilitarianism ("John Rawls, Theory of Justice, 1971; Bernard Williams, A Critique of Utilitarianism, 1973; Michel Foucault, Surveiller et punir, 1975", cited by Bourcier et al. (2016); Mauss Review)

Professional activities : as a teacher

Volunteer activities : As a cooperator : 20 years research and 13 years as a volunteer but few direct interactions.

# Introduction

## Three experiments in cooperatives

### As a volunteer

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Le Temps de Vivre, <a href="http://www.letempsdevivre.co">www.letempsdevivre.co</a> | Council of wise people and workshop leader: 2012-2021          |
| Coop Atlantique, <a href="http://www.coop-atlantique.fr">www.coop-atlantique.fr</a> | Local Circle 2008-2014 and Supervisory Board Member: 2012-2014 |
| Railcoop, <a href="http://www.railcoop.fr">www.railcoop.fr</a>                      | Member animation circle, local circle: 2020-2021               |

Table 1 - Personal investment of the author in the three cooperatives studied

Other cooperatives as a simple member : energy, finance, car sharing, football, internet.

### As a researcher

Cooperatives in short food supply chain, bank, insurance, entrepreneurship, craft, retail

→ No official cross works but maybe spontaneous ones.

# Introduction

## Critics to academic research

"Dewey's objective (1929): the destruction of the barriers which have divided theory and practice" according to Lhotellier and Saint-Arnaud (1994)

"formalised knowledge (...) do not sufficiently provide actors with the resources necessary to understand their condition" (Penven, 2013)

In SSE :

- Proximity to Popular Education : suspicion to academic system
- Own research approach

**Did I use some research works for my action as a cooperator ?**

**1. Methods**

**2. Results**

# A/ Which utility of scientific methods ?

## 1/ Diffusion of knowledge

- “revealing tacit knowledge” (Schön, 1983), thanks to participatory observation, interviews, questionnaires:
  - TDV : diversity of volunteer actions
  - Railcoop : mutualising the meeting practices
- New knowledges (Hubert et al 2013) : not observed

# A/ Which utility of scientific methods ?

2/ Recognition of people :

- TDV : active listening of involved people
- Railcoop : active listening of little involved people + quizz on different categories

3/ Highlight of a topic

not just during a meeting but all along the survey.

- Survey on local food in Coop Atlantique
- facilitation techniques in Railcoop :
  - daring tackling a topic
  - asking questions rather than teaching solutions
- TDV : what slows down volunteering

→ making people and issues visible.

# A/ Which utility of scientific methods ?

4/ Results for partners rather than for involved people

- Involved people keep discussing : little interest on results (figures and classifications)
- Partners need some abstracts on the enterprise since they do not live the experience

# B/ Which utility of results ?

**Galvani (1999) and Freire (1977) : criticism of academic literature.**

- 1/ Quick and clear identification of stakes
  - Railcoop about emotional expressions in deliberative contexts (Nez, 2018)
  - Railcoop about weak and strong ties (Nicole-Drancourt, 2021; Granovetter, 1973)
  - TDV : informal sources of power vs democratic spaces (Chevallier, Dellier, 2020)



# B/ Which utility of results ?

## 2/ Legitimation of a topic

- Coop Atlantique : volunteering in commercial spaces (Caire, Chevallier, 2017)
- Coop Atlantique : recruiting young people (Jacques Ion's works)
- Coop Atlantique : slowing down a piece of decision on rules of procedure (Chevallier, 2013a, 2013b)
- TDV : recognition of volunteers (Millette 2005, Mitchell et al. 2001)

# B/ Which utility of results ?

- 3/ Utility for partners and general public

Contrary to appearances ...

- Coop Atlantique : weak differences  $\neq$  inutility of cooperatives :
  - Crossed influences (Ansart et al., 2017)
- Coop Atlantique : Slowness  $\neq$  inefficiency
  - No efficiency differences (Doucouliagos 1997, Fortin et al. 2011, Sexton et al. 1993), quicker diffusion
  - Sociological profile of administrators  $\rightarrow$  Less variability (Biondi et al. 2007, Mangolte 2007) vs excessive volatility of the current economic system (Colletis, 2008)

# Conclusion

## from those 3 experiments

Utility of methods :

- 1. Revealing and diffusing practices**
- 2. Recognising people**
- 3. Highlighting topics**
4. Communicating with partners

Utility of results :

- 1. Quick and clear identification**
- 2. Arguing, defending a point**
3. Communicating with partners and general public

Thank you for your attention. [marius.chevallier@unilim.fr](mailto:marius.chevallier@unilim.fr)