Article

Cooperative Lifecycle Framing—Reinvention or Regeneration and Does It Matter?

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Abstract: The co-operative lifecycle framework has been a very useful concept in depicting the historical lifecycle of co-operatives. It is also particularly helpful in identifying and communicating if a co-operative is on a degenerative trajectory and points to the possibility of choice and re-invention. This paper focuses on this re-invention phase of the lifecycle framework and questions if re-invention is the best concept to use either in theory or practice. The paper explores whether regeneration may be a more promising concept, drawing on regenerative development and relationality literature. This paper concludes with an adaptation of Cook's co-operative lifecycle framework by incorporating a regenerative enabling capability as a metric for success.

Keywords: co-operative lifecycle; regeneration; relationality

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the "how" of co-operative re-invention. The paper draws on co-operative lifecycle frameworks, in particular, Cook's [1], which incorporates the possibility and choice of re-invention as well as isomorphism and degeneration. These frameworks are important as they highlight that co-operatives have a choice of reinvention or degeneration [1,2]. Much of the co-operative literature, until recently, was dominated by a degeneration inevitability [3–6]. The choice of reinvention built into the lifecycle framework has helped to weaken the dominance of this degeneration thesis. This has benefited both the co-operative literature and practice. However, the co-operative lifecycle frameworks have been more limited in terms of the actual "how" of that re-invention [7]. This paper pays particular attention to the "how", building on the work of Byrne [7].

To explore the "how", the paper first asks if the framing of co-operative renewal as re-invention or regeneration matters. The paper conceptually argues that it does matter and that the two framings result in different development paths, where re-invention is more likely to come as a response to a crisis, while regeneration lends itself more to a continual process. Following this line of thought, the paper draws on Lapoutte's [8] framing of the co-operative as a living system. However, rather than exploring this through a permaculture lens as Lapoutte approached in her paper, this paper explores the co-operative as a living system through relationality and regenerative theory. The focus in this literature on emergence and context-based development and emergence fits well with co-operative regeneration.

The paper will first introduce co-operatives and co-operative lifecycle frameworks. This is then followed by a discussion on re-invention and regeneration framings in terms of co-operative development. The paper then follows with a discussion of regeneration within a living system and regenerative development context. It concludes with a discussion of co-operatives as enablers of regenerative development through their ability to enable relationality. The paper concludes with an adaptation of Cook's co-operative lifecycle framework.

2. Co-Operative Lifecycle Frameworks

Co-operatives are a "self-help business owned and democratically controlled by the people who use its services" [9]. They are effectively user-owned, user-controlled and user-benefited businesses [9]. They are guided by seven International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) (1995) principles. To help us understand co-operative growth and development, the lifecycle approach has been useful [1,10,11].

While there are many organizational lifecycle models, the most famous being the Evolution and Revolution lifecycle model [12], the main focus of these has been on the corporate rather than co-operative sector [11,13].

However, co-operatives have developed their own lifecycle frameworks originating first with Webb's degeneration thesis [14] which outlined the natural lifecycle of co-operatives as moving over time from idealist and democratic to capitalist entities. This degeneration thesis became dominant in the literature where it was further developed by other co-operative writers such as [3–6]. This degeneration tends to be driven by a diminishing member democracy [2] and increased heterogeneity in member preferences [1,15]. The authors [2], drawing on the following co-operative writers [1,4,16–18], summarise the key stages in the co-operative lifecycle as "conquest, economic consolidation, coexistence and administrative power" resulting finally in either "dissolution of the co-operative" or "isomorphism with the dominant institutional environment" which is diagrammatically summarised by [2].

While the degeneration thesis has been dominant in the co-operative literature, there has also been a counter literature [9,17,19–21] highlighting that degeneration is not inevitable and that regeneration is possible in the lifecycle of the co-operative. The co-operative writers [2] present this as stage five, "Regeneration", in the co-operative lifecycle outlined in Figure 1. This regeneration arises when the co-operative members "recognise the democratic decline" and make a decision to revitalize the co-operative drawing on social values and co-operative practice [2]. In the four stages prior to regeneration in Bretos et al.'s [2] summary lifecycle framework, the co-operative would seem to be on a degenerative trajectory in terms of co-operative democracy and values, which are deepening with each phase of development.
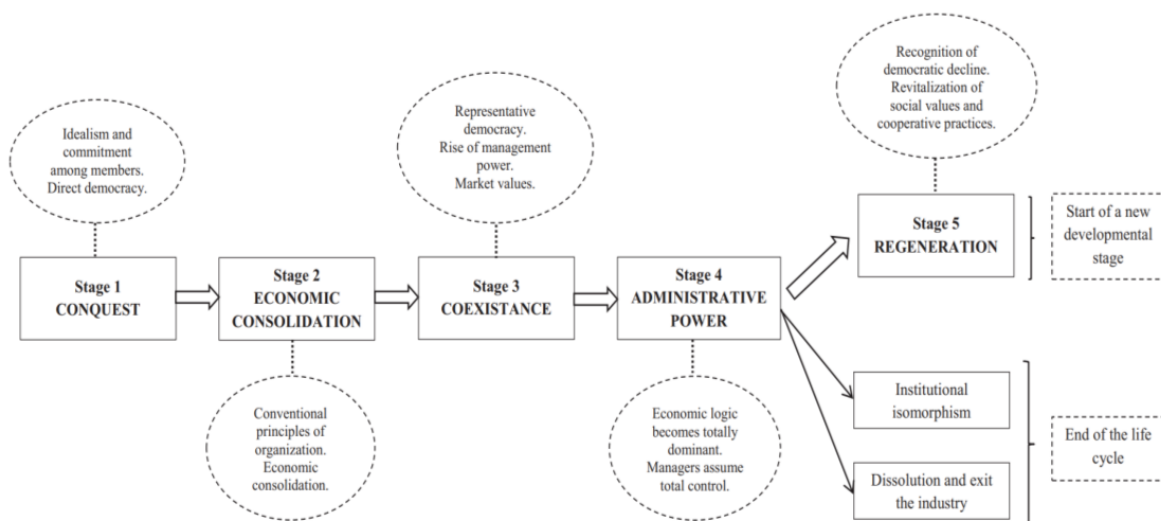

Figure 1. Co-operative Life Cycle. Reprinted with permission from [2]. 2020, Ignacio Bretos.

In Cook's [1,15] co-operative lifecycle framework, the underlying value frame seems to be broader than in Bretos et al.'s [2], where he indicates that "co-operative health" combines firstly private and collective goods (prices paid or received by members, services, feeling of community, social capital and contributed collective good) and secondly perceived probability of co-operative survivability. Cook indicates that survivability or longevity is primarily achieved through the minimizing of ownership costs. Co-operative health

metric is a negotiated performance metric in the co-operative and will vary from one co-operative to another [1]. Against this co-operative health metric, Cook presents the co-operative lifecycle, with "the choice of re-invention" appearing in Phase 5, similar to Bretos et al.'s lifecycle framework. However, in Cook's lifecycle framework, there appears to be a continual (or at least points of) regeneration from Phase 1 to Phase 4, whereas in Bretos et al. [2], the co-operative appears to be in a degeneration trajectory in these earlier phases, although the underlying value framework in them differs. In Cook's [1] lifecycle framework, potential for regeneration is triggered through tinkering mechanisms guided by a co-operative genius. Cook's lifecycle framework with these mechanisms is presented in Figure 2.
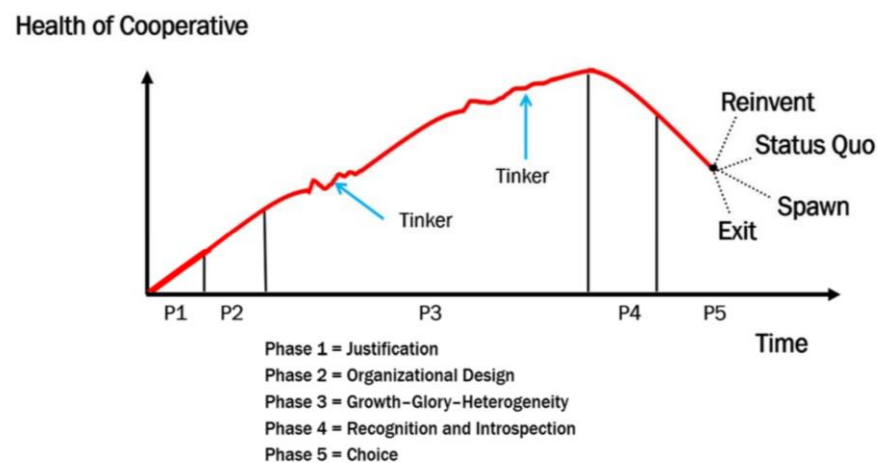

Figure 2. Cook's Lifecycle Framework. Reprinted with permission from [1]. 2018, Michael Cook.

Cook indicates that keeping the co-operative on track in P3 requires co-operative tinkering. Cook and Iliopoulos [15] define tinkering as a continuous process to minimize frictions arising from high ownership costs, involving generic solutions such as user alignment, member retention, supply/demand balancing and transparency. This tinkering is driven by a kind of co-operative genius, which is defined as "a process executed by employees and members who understand the value to the member and the co-operative of minimizing collective decision-making costs" [1] (p. 9). It has some similarity to the evolution in Greiner's lifecycle framework [12]. This tinkering mechanism is no longer sufficient when the co-operative goes into decline in P5 and something more is required. The co-operative has then reached a crisis point and is left with a number of "choices", which Cook [1] groups as follows:

1. Reinvent;
2. Do nothing and hope things will change;
3. Spawn;
4. Exit.

The last three options seem to involve a managerial focus and control and a continuation of a degenerative development trajectory, resulting in likely isomorphism or exit (as depicted in [2] in Figure 1). The first option, "Reinvent" (or described as re-development by Tang et al. [11]), involves a major shift in the status quo and a likely loosening of managerial control or at least a reaching out to the membership for solutions. In contrast, Cook [1] citing [22] (p. 15) indicates that re-invention arises as a result of "collective entrepreneurial member and management leadership" usually combined with a context of "co-operative firm chaos, mergers and acquisitions".

According to Cook [1], re-invention involves an overhaul of one of the following: co-operative purpose, organizational culture and/or member/patronage ownership and control. With this re-invention on one or more of these fronts, co-operative health increases in Cook's Lifecycle Framework. However, there would seem to be a contradiction with

re-invention discussed in terms of a change to member/patronage ownership and control, which is likely to reduce member democracy, feeling of community, social capital and contributed collective goods and hence overall co-operative health, remembering that co-operative health is a negotiated concept in each co-operative. This may result in an initial regeneration followed by a degenerative development trajectory. Cook also introduces the likelihood of multiple and continual re-inventions during the life of the co-operative. This is presented in Figure 3.
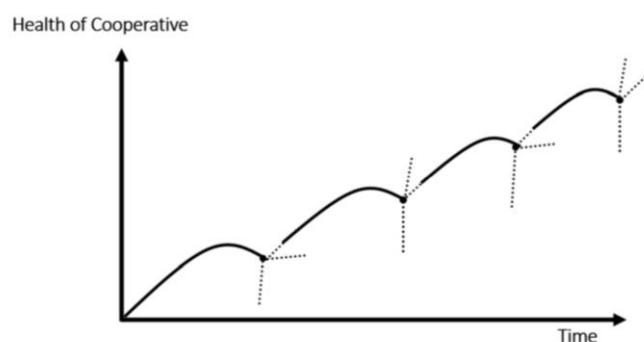

Figure 3. Multiple Co-operative Lifecycles. Reprinted with permission from [1]. 2018, Michael Cook.

Cook indicates that a co-operative with multiple lifecycles is in a continuous process of re-invention and refers to them as "adaptive cooperatives who pursue the opportunity to regenerate through multiple life cycles" [1] (p. 13). This is line with Stryjan's [19,20] continual reproduction and degeneration of the co-operative. This may also better depict life of a "healthy" co-operative. It also portrays the situation where degeneration and regeneration are taking place at the same time, resulting in a healthy tension within the co-operative. Bretos et al. [2], in their analysis of degeneration and regeneration tensions in the Mondragon co-operative movement, indicated that regeneration does not necessarily completely replace degeneration tendencies and that some aspects may regenerate while others degenerate, but that overall, the regenerating co-operative is on a regenerative trajectory. This leads us to question the appropriateness of the term re-invention for the co-operative and whether a better concept may be regeneration.

3. Reinvention or Regeneration

Re-invention may be problematic for a number of reasons. The re-invention may not come from the membership but may arise as a result of a market innovation that garners the increased support of the membership for a period of time. However, such a re-invention in the longer term, may strengthen the power of management rather than the membership. A dramatic re-invention, while recognized as necessary for the survival of the co-operative, may be quite traumatic for the membership. While this may strengthen member democracy in support of the re-invention to avert a crisis, at the same time it may put an increased strain on it. Depending on how the re-invention goes, it may also create increased member heterogeneity in those loyal and less loyal to the re-invention move. Gaining support for the re-invention and its successful implementation will also require significant effort on behalf of the management and members, and thereby increase ownership costs. Re-invention also calls for an overhaul or overthrow of degenerative tendencies in the co-operative and a move towards some ideal. This, in a way, sets the member and the co-operative up for an ultimate disappointment as degeneration alongside regeneration is a natural part of the life of a co-operative [2,23].

Regeneration, on the other hand, is a continuous process, whereby there is a recognition that the co-operative, like all organisations, is in a constant state of degeneration [20] and that continual member steering [19,20] and tinkering [1] are required. Stryjan [20] (p. 66) defines member steering as "the continuous task of setting the organization right is shouldered by its members. Members prime contribution should be sought in the perpetual,

decentralized activities of troubleshooting and correction directed both inwards, to remedy or prevent deterioration in their organization, and outwards, to help push it through periodical environmental quick-sands". Hence, regeneration very much calls on the agency of the members and encourages the organisation to work with the potential at hand. Lapoutte [8] captures this regenerative potential through her framing of co-operatives as livings systems. While re-invention looks for the solution elsewhere and turns it back on the historical and present reality of the co-operative, regeneration on the other hand, emerges out of the potential (drawn from the past and current context) of the co-operative. The difference between re-invention and regeneration is captured in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Re-invention and Regeneration Summary Table of Discussion above.

Dimensions	Re-Invention	Regeneration
Event/continual process	More "event" and "outcome" focused	More process focused
Source of innovation	May emerge more from a market or management innovation or from gaining economies of scale rather than from the membership	Requires on-going agency from members
Capability	Significant effort required; may increase ownership costs and, over time, member heterogeneity	Building on-going capability; less traumatic for co-op
Centricity	Organisation focused	Lends itself to consider regeneration outside co-operative system
Overthrow V's working with what is at hand	Suggests a complete replacement of degenerative pattern; overhaul	Suggests degeneration and regeneration working alongside each other [2]
Origin	Rejection of past and current reality	Emerges out of past and current reality

To explore regeneration in co-operative context, we can look at the concept of a living system as Lapoutte [8] did in her research on co-operatives.

4. Regeneration and Living Systems Concept

Regeneration is based on the concept of a living system. Miller [24], under his Living System Theory, indicates that living systems span single cells to plants, animals, groups, organizations, societies and supranational systems. These livings systems are "open systems that exchange matter-energy and information with its environment", and are "integrated together to form actively self-regulating, developing, unitary systems with purposes and goals" (Dias drawing on the work of [24] (p. 316)). Dias [25] (p. 319) indicates that living systems offer a set of first criteria that allows us to understand the world as "alive and at work".

All living systems (human and non-human) have an inherent capacity for "self-renewal" [26] and to "continuously self-organise and evolve" (Reed cited in [25]). This inherent capacity for self-renewal leads [27] to question the premise that all systems are subject to inevitable entropy and indicates that it is not an accurate description of the way that living systems actually work. Co-operatives are living systems [8], and when framed as such are also subject to self-renewal and regeneration rather than degeneration.

As well as this inherent attribute of self-organisation, living systems are interconnected with other living systems, where regeneration of "one form of life is inseparably connected to the healthy development of all others" [28] (p. 509). All living systems are nested within wider living systems [29]. For example, the member, co-operative, community, sector and so on—all of which are living systems in their own right. Changes at one level, will impact at other levels and all are subject to the same evolutionary principles [30].

Regeneration is underpinned by living systems thinking and regeneration is "found only in the world of living systems" [25] (p. 319). All living systems have a latent potential, and it is through regeneration that this latency emerges and evolves [25] drawing on the

work of Sanford). To further explore the concept of regeneration, it is briefly compared to sustainability below.

5. Regeneration and Sustainability

While the concept of sustainability has greater prominence in the academic and policy literature, there is an increasing acknowledgement that it may not be enough, particularly where the focus is on net-zero or carbon neutrality [29,31,32]. Even when sustainability is considered more broadly, incorporating social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions, and where the environment is about more than emissions, the metrics for measuring social and biodiversity dimensions are less well developed than those of emissions [33]. Hence, the sustainability narrative seems to default to net-zero [32]. It has been noted by many [29,31,32] that sustainability as net-zero will not be enough by itself and that the survival of humanity depends on moving beyond this understanding of sustainability to restoration and regeneration [29]. This is presented in Figure 4.
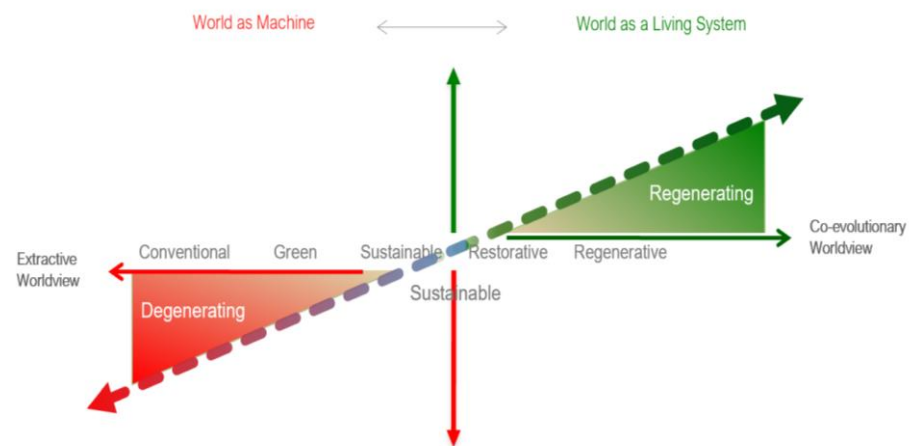

Figure 4. Beyond Sustainability, Source [29]. Reprinted with permission from [29]. 2007, Bill Reed, Regenesis.

As indicated in Figure 4, Reed [29] indicates that we need to move from the red degenerative (conventional "business as usual", green) towards neutral (sustainable) and into the green regenerative (restorative and regenerative) space. While much of the business world is focusing on "Green" and "Sustainable" it has been argued that this will not be sufficient alone [25–27,31] (co-operatives could move beyond this impasse and break new ground as regenerative organisations [8]). They have used this approach historically in areas such as workers' rights, free education, ethical and fair trade, resulting in eventual social change [34]. To better understand the potential of co-operatives as regenerative organisations, we now turn to a discussion of regenerative development.

6. Regenerative Development

Regenerative development is the creation of an enabling context for developing the capacity of human and non-human living systems to realize their innate potential [35]. However, its focus is not on individual stand-alone systems, but on the interconnection and co-evolutionary relationship between living systems. Regenerative development and design originate from permaculture which was the "first ecological design system to introduce the concept of regenerative effect" [36] (p. 120). Regeneration was made more explicit in the concept and practice of regenerative agriculture [37], and later, again in the concept of regenerative design [38] and regenerative development [27]. Mang & Haggard [27], working with other researchers and regenerative development practitioners at the Regenesis Group have developed seven principles, see Box 1. These principles have been developed over the many years of working on regenerative projects with organisations and communities. A regenerative organisation or project must first start with a whole

system (this could be a community or region) and view their own organisation/project as nested within that whole system. The third and fourth principles focus on developing capabilities and building collaborative relationships between nested systems.

Box 1. Regeneration Principles [3].

1.　　Work with whole systems;
2.　　Work with potential, not problems;
3.　　Develop capability;
4.　　Build a collaborative field;
5.　　Work with nested systems;
6.　　Find nodal interventions;
7.　　Work from the uniqueness of each place.

Mang & Haggard [27] also put particular emphasis on place (geographical and social). Each place is unique, and the regenerative solutions should emerge out of that uniqueness. This bounded-system focus is necessary, otherwise it is too easy to slip into inaction and abstraction [29,39]. Lapoutte [8], in her living system theory of co-operative, also puts particular focus on geography and place. Relational theorists [40–51] also place significant weight on place and highlight the importance of an emergence of a "situated ethics" [42] which acts a first philosophy [43].

The regenerative principles also focus on the importance of potential. Often with human designed projects, the focus is on fixing or counteracting a problem [27]. However, the regenerative development approach is to focus instead on potential rather than problems [27].

Co-operatives, as place-based organisations with a collective mass of members, would seem to be well placed to be key agents in regenerative development. However, when co-operatives are considering reinvention or regeneration, they tend to often limit their thinking to the organisation itself rather than broader regeneration of the place/community. Regenesis, in their work, hold that the real product of design is not the structure (organisation) but the work the structure (organisation) enables [27]

This requires a shifting of focus to the external community and its regeneration rather than the regeneration of the entity itself. This becomes easier if it is a continuous process rather than responding to crisis in the fifth stage of the co-operative lifecycle framework.

Brattleboro Co-operative is an example of an organisation which achieved its own regeneration as part of a broader focus on regeneration of the region. The co-operative started in 1975 as a small co-operative buying club and developed into a relatively large supermarket in Brattleboro The co-operative wished to develop its sustainability identity. They employed the services of a regenerative development consultancy group [52] to develop a green building but went much further than this to become an enabling hub of regeneration in the wider community. They also became part of a dense network of co-operatives, all working towards the development of the local community. The co-op is now a significant anchor institution in the greater Brattleboro community [53].

7. Co-Operatives as an Enabling System

When regeneration is discussed in a co-operative context, the focus tends to be on the co-operative itself rather than acting as an enabler of regeneration in the wider community or region, as in the case of Brattleboro Co-op. This enabling role is closer to the original purpose of co-operatives in their founding years.

Cook's adaptive organisation concept with multiple lifecycles is more closely aligned with the concept of regeneration than the more static and liner lifecycle framework. Co-operative literature, particularly that which has focused on a regeneration rather than degeneration thesis, has made a significant contribution to viewing co-operatives as organi-

sations with the capability to continually regenerate. However, there is very little guidance on how this might take place.

Lapoutte [8] breaks new ground in the co-operative literature when she presents co-operatives as living systems. To create a conceptual and practical framework around this, she draws on the permaculture literature and practice. However, as a practical framework, there may be a danger of its complexity and development as a separate ideological framework from the co-operative ideology overwhelming those trying to act upon it. The reader who is a practitioner may be left in a position of not knowing where to start or maybe adopting an ideological code that becomes abstract and rhetorical.

The regenerative development and regenerative agriculture frameworks may offer a more practical roadmap from which to enable co-operative regeneration as a living system interconnected with wider systems. The starting point of regeneration would seem to be "mindset". The regenerative co-operative shifts its orientation from "problems" to "potential"; recognises the innate potential in the co-op, its members and the wider community; looks outward rather than inward; and recognizes evolutionary processes while recognising that it cannot engineer evolution but can create evolutionary-friendly conditions for a regenerative spirit or genius with the community and membership to emerge. This genius is effectively the lifeblood of regeneration and is the living part of the living system of regeneration.

The co-operative is just part of the enabling context for regeneration, but the actual regeneration only emerges out of the will and relations that exist within an organisation or community. Without the will of the people living in a community or the members in a co-operative to engage and align themselves with regeneration, there will be little regeneration. Reed [29] (p. 677) refers to this as "the consciousness and spirit of the people engaged in a place" in order to sustain regeneration as an ongoing evolutionary process. This is effectively the relational life of a community or co-operative that is always unfolding and emerging. However, this emergence requires an enabling context: co-operatives who are embedded in a place and who operate from a living systems perspective are well placed to act as enablers for this emergence. In the relationality literature this is referred to as the "we-relation" [45,47,54]. Byrne [7], in her research on co-operatives, argues that this "we-relation" ontological framing integrates the duality and captures the identity of co-operatives and has a better fit than the frequently used economic and sociological individual or collective framing in co-operative research. We now turn to a discussion of the concept of the "we-relation".

8. The "We-Relation"

The concept of the we-relation is understood as the relations that emerge of a dialogical space between the I and the other [40,41,51] or the I and the group [45]. This in-between space is also referred to as the inter-human [40] or inter-world [46] (p. 145). Out of this space emerges the we-relation, which it a third reality with its own generative powers [47]. The we-relation is neither a "bridge between nor a mixture of individual and systematic components" [47] (p. 14). Archer [49] (p. 475) indicates that the "emergent properties are therefore relational, they are not contained in the elements themselves, but could not exist apart from them". Following on from this, the we-relation does not emerge out of the common purpose of the individual players [47] or rational or intentional thought [42]. It, at the same time, does not mean a reduction of the individual or a fusion of the I and other [40,41,49,50] but the individual discovers their own identity in response to the other [41,42].

This ontological understanding of the individual role of relations and emergent reality contrasts with the predominant "individual self as a bounded being" focus in today's society [54]. Gergen [54] indicates that there is a need for a change in how we perceive both society and the relation, from an "aggregate of individuals and groups" to the "recognition of an indivisible and latent force that condenses and connects together all three terms (individual, group, and in-between) at some primal and indiscernible level" [55] (p. 1698).

It is through this type of "relational co-ordination" that organisations come into being [54] and maintain their continued well-being (Follett, cited in Graham, 1995 [56]). To start with, organizational relations are dynamic, but over time become static, where the natural tendency is to "hold onto what works" Gergen [54]. Part of the issue is that the organisation views itself and its members as bounded entities rather than relational subjects. Gergen [54] indicates that once a "separation has been struck" between those internal and external to the organisation the "grounds are prepared for its failure . . . the major problem here is that of detachment from context. As the realities and values within the organisation become all consuming, so does the world of those outside become irrelevant, alien or antagonistic" (Gergen [54], pp. 343–344). Once this process starts, Gergen [54] believes it summons the end of the entity, system or organisation, no matter its size or power.

Co-operatives, in particular, are deeply relational [57,58]; they emerge out of the relational and are continuously reproduced out of the relational [9,19,20,54]. Donati [47] (p. 190) indicates that "achieving and maintaining the We relation is the problem of all voluntary associations . . . often when the association is founded, the We seems clear at the start . . . however over time, relations evolve among the members, including those that result in the weakening and disappearance of the relational subject . . . where the voluntary association becomes unresponsive to the primary relations at the micro level".

To gain a better understanding of the role of the "we-relational" in co-operative development, Byrne [7] integrated the we-relational into Cook's co-operative lifecycle.

9. Co-Operative Lifecycle—Integrating the We-Relation and Regeneration

Byrne [7] incorporated the "we-relational" into Cook's lifecycle framework in her paper on co-operative identity and relationality. This adaption is presented in Figure 5.
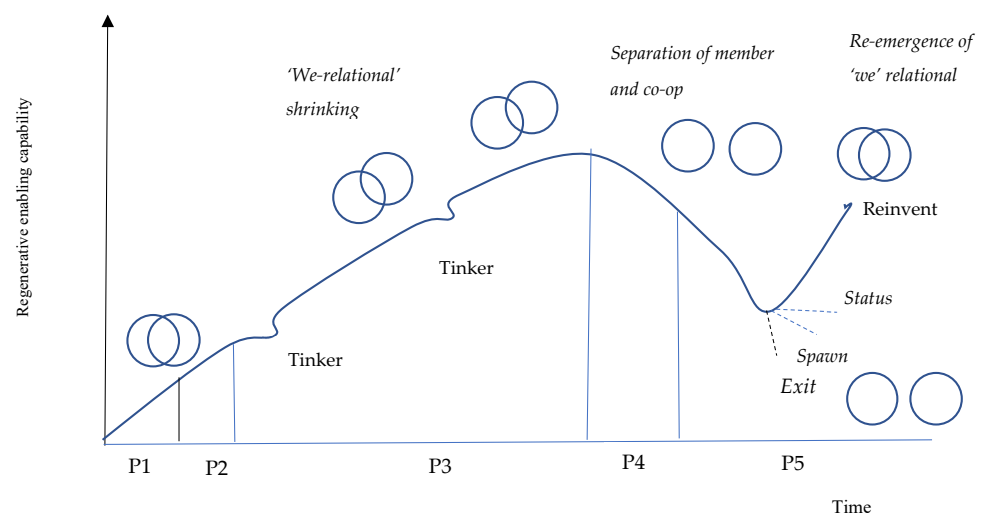

Figure 5. Co-operative lifecycle incorporating the "we-relational". Adapted with permission from [1] 2018, Michael Cook.

In its founding period (P1), the co-operative emerges from the "we-relational" and is further established in P2 through the we-relational. However, with the maturing co-operative in P3, the we-relational shrinks. To halt this process, Cook's "tinkering" could be drawn upon. As we enter Phase 4 (P4), the co-operative starts its decline, and the member construct loses its power [59]. At this point, the member could be reduced to a rhetoric [59,60] or a "symbol of organizational discourse" [59]. It is at this stage that the co-operative starts it decline and the organisation and the member start to separate. Effectively, the "we-relation" disappears, and as indicated by Donati, the co-op "becomes unresponsive to the primary relations" at the micro or member level [47] (p. 190). In P5, the exit, spawn or status-quo choice options are likely to lead to a permanent disappearance

of the "we-relation". It is only with the re-invention choice that there is a likelihood of a re-emergence of the "we-relation".

Integrating the we-relational into Cook's co-operative lifecycle framework allows us to diagrammatically present both Donati's [47] and Gergen's [54] discussion on the lifecycle degeneration of the "we-relation" in co-operatives and voluntary organisations. However, as discussed earlier in this paper, co-operatives are living systems where degeneration is not inevitable in co-operatives and while this lifecycle framework, highlights the options in Phase 5, it does not depict the natural and continuous flow of regeneration and degeneration.

Cook's [1] adaptive live-cycle framework may be more useful to capture both regeneration and the life of the co-operative, where it depicts continual degeneration and regeneration and adaptation. For this paper, the author has slightly adapted Cook's framework and incorporated Regenerative Enabling Capability rather than Health of the Co-operative on the vertical axis. In Cook's lifecycle framework, health of the co-operative is a negotiated term within the individual co-operative and may default to the financial health of the co-operative, particularly in times of crisis, see Figure 6 below. It could be argued that this likelihood of default to economic growth and financials leads to a deterministic framework. However, by incorporating regenerative enabling capability as the metric on the vertical axis, the lifecycle framework becomes less deterministic. Regenerative enabling capability is a more holistic term incorporating the co-operative itself, the member and the wider community, where the co-operative has the capability to enable regeneration in the external community and within the co-operative itself.
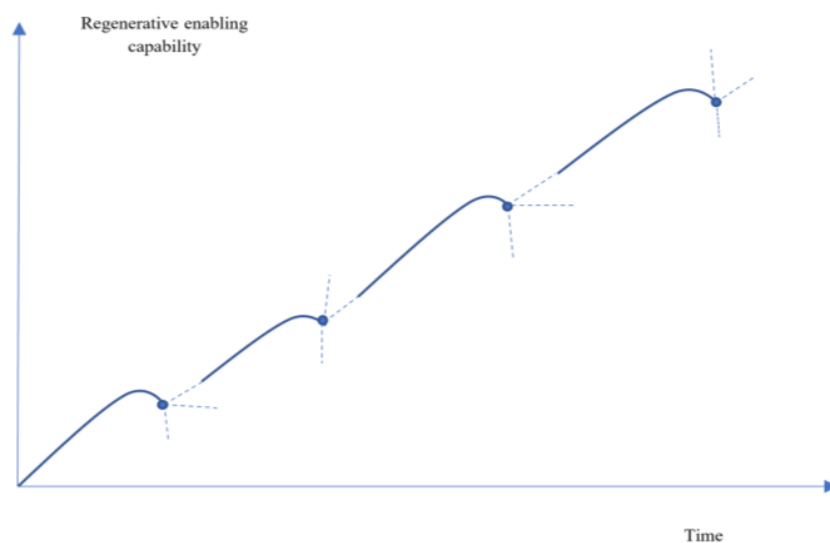

Figure 6. Co-operatives as Regenerative Organisations (Adapted with permission from [1] 2018, Michael Cook.).

Cook's concepts of tinkering and co-operative genius and Stryan's steering are essential conceptual building blocks in a theoretical and practical understanding of the regenerative-enabling capability of co-operatives. However, in saying that, these concepts as conceptualised would seem to be more internally focused and hence, may need to be theoretically broadened to incorporate a regenerative enabling capability.

It is useful to return briefly to a discussion of these concepts. Cook [1] outlines tinkering as a process which reduces frictions arising due to ownership costs through member alignment and retention mechanisms. According to [1], this tinkering process is underpinned by a co-operative genius, which is an understanding of the value of "minimising collective decision-making costs" to the member and the co-operative. Therefore, Cook closely aligns the tinkering and co-operative genius concept together with a focus on the minimization of ownership costs. Therefore, these concepts are very much positioned

from within the co-operative and the smooth running and survival of the co-operative. While Stryan's steering concept is broader than Cook's concepts, it is still internally focused. Stryjan's steering involves the "continuous task of setting the organisation right" through "troubleshooting and correction" carried out by the members to "prevent deterioration in their organisation".

Therefore, consideration may need to be given to a broader ontological underpinning for these concepts, incorporating the reality of co-operatives as a nested system that emerge out of relations and an embedded context. To broaden these concepts, co-operative researchers could draw on Lapoutte's [8] broader framework of permaculture and living systems and the regenerative principles as discussed earlier in this paper. Mang & Haggard [27] outline the characteristics of a regenerative enabling organisation. It may be useful for co-operatives to explore to what extent they contain regenerative characteristics or regenerative principles. They are likely to find that they contain many of the characteristics necessary for enabling regeneration and may even be enabling regeneration within their communities. This is in line with [61] who advocates that co-operative theory builds itself from co-operative practice. Starting from the perspective of co-operative practice, and then exploring tinkering or steering from a regenerative perspective would broaden these concepts. The building blocks, both in theory and practice, are there already, we just need to allow the co-operative practice to reveal itself to us and give the space for the co-operative theory and regenerative practices to emerge.

Figure 7 integrates the "we-relation" into Cook's multiple lifecycle diagram.
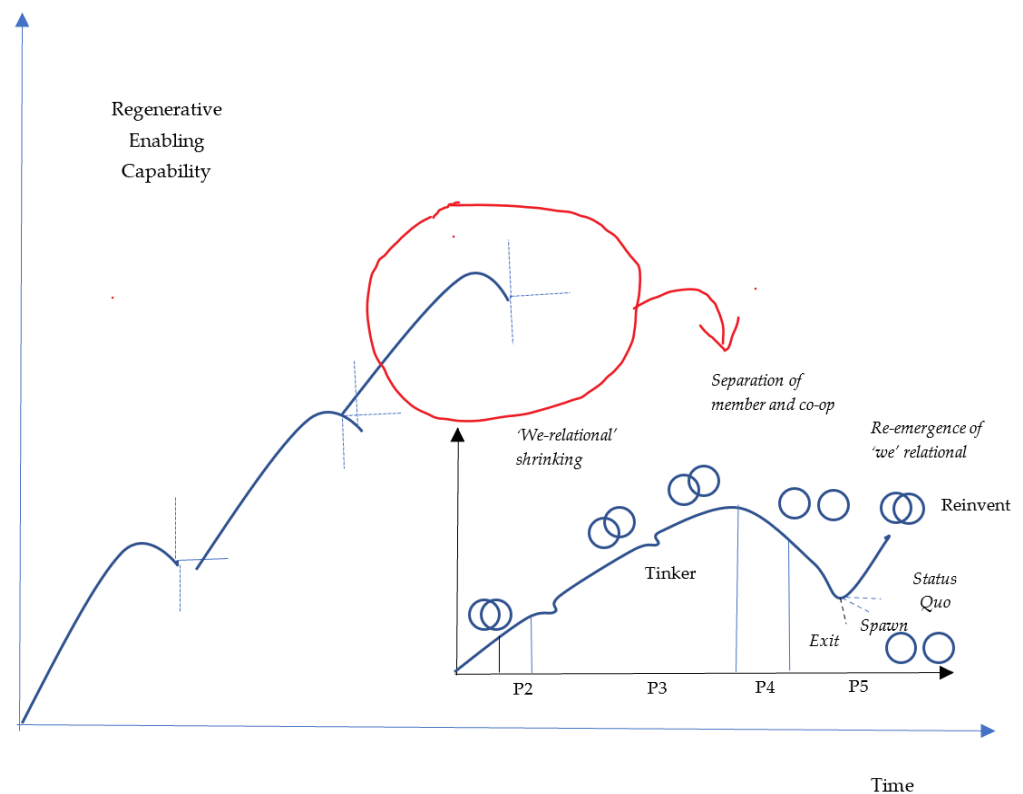

Figure 7. Further adaptation of Cook's multiple lifecycles diagram.

The co-operative as an enabler of regeneration within the membership and the community enables the continual emergence of the "we-relation", and when it is not able to achieve this emergence, the co-operative goes into decline as indicated by [47,54].

10. Conclusions

The focus of this paper is co-operative lifecycle framework and the concept of regeneration. Much of the co-operative writers, including the author of this paper, have primarily discussed co-operative regeneration through the concept of co-operative re-invention. This paper questions the use of the term re-invention in terms of co-operative lifecycle. Re-invention suggests a complete overhaul and a once-off dramatic event. It fits well within the co-operative lifecycle diagrammatic frameworks—where the co-operative decides at a certain point to further degenerate or completely re-invent itself. It suggests an overthrow of the degenerative tendencies within the co-operative and a break from the past. Regeneration on the other hand suggests a continuous process where the degenerative and regenerative dimensions of the co-operative co-exist. Regeneration also highlights the living system reality of the co-operative. Rather than a dramatic overhaul, regeneration involves small steps and emergence out of the past and current context. Co-operatives also fit very well within the regenerative development literature. They clearly have many of the characteristics and the potential to be an enabling entity for regeneration in their communities. Regeneration also involves a turning towards the members and the community.

Regeneration also brings us back to the relational reality of co-operatives. Regeneration and co-operatives both emerge out of relations. Byrne [7] highlights the importance of the we relation in the regeneration of co-operatives. She adapts Cook's lifecycle framework by incorporating the "we-relation" along the lifecycle. This adaption is further developed in this paper, through the incorporation of the regenerative enabling capability on the vertical axis in Figures 5–7 in this paper.

The regenerative development approach allows co-operatives to see themselves as living systems as discussed by [8] but also provides an operational framework at the same time. However, this operational framework is only useful if the co-operative is able to see themselves and their communities as living systems which operate according to evolutionary principles. They must also understand that their role is to offer an evolutionary-friendly context.

Hence, it is argued in this paper that the use of the re-invention or regeneration concept does matter in terms of co-operative theory and practice. The generative metaphor [62] of regeneration versus reinvention sets the co-operative down a different path of development and the co-operative researcher along a different conceptual framework.

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