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## **Idea, Strategies, and Chances of Cooperatives in Cultural Heritage Management<sup>1</sup>**

Sustainability is a theoretical concept for the ecological, i.e. the political, economic and sociocultural management of the future but it has to deal with the resources of yesterday and today. Cultural heritage for this purpose is an eminent important resource because it contains the experience of 40.000 years of trial and error in organizing human life. And I dare to say that besides of incredible scientific, technological and medical progress during the last 200 years it is not evident that we, men and women of today, are dealing our tasks always better than our ancestors (Harari 2014). It is not necessary to underline that we are the first generation who is able to destroy the whole system of life on this planet and up to now it seems to be the only one we have got.

This preamble might be sent before in order to draft the serious framework we are confronted and to emphasize the necessity for a deeper exchange we are invited to have at this conference in order to search for intelligent solutions – smaller or bigger ones – for the main challenges of today which are challenges of cultural heritage and human future at the same time.

My contribution to the topic – the idea and chances of cooperatives – in the first view seems to be a smaller proposal. But it could have the potential to become a bigger one.

### **Cooperatives as Intangible Cultural Heritage**

In 2016 the “idea and practice of organized interests in cooperatives” have been taken to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2016). From 2008 when the convention has been finally accepted until 2017 a number of 470 elements corresponding to 117 countries

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<sup>1</sup> Contribution to the thematic session “Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage – How to turn good European Practices into a Model of socially inclusive Governance”; the oral character of the presentation was kept.

have been accepted by the UNESCO ([ich.unesco.org/en/lists](http://ich.unesco.org/en/lists)) signifying the vast landscape of customs and traditions which are forming the diversity of life in a maybe soft but lasting manner. The proposal to accept cooperatives officially as important cultural heritage has been made by the German committee of the UNESCO, but the idea of cooperatives has never been an invention of one country or another. It is, in contrast, a fundamental concept of the human organization since the beginning of humanity and it is spread all over the world ([www.ica.coop](http://www.ica.coop)).

From the anthropological point of view collaboration and competition are the two poles of social organization which always have been coexisting in rivalry to the other and due to the specific historical conditions, one has become dominant versus the other. There is no doubt that in the upcoming modern industrial and capitalist society the principle of competition has become more and more dominant creating a lot of social and economic challenges (Hobsbawm 1962/1975/1987, Bayly 2004, Osterhammel 2014), e.g.

- modernization in agriculture (emancipation of the serfs, investment in machines and fertilizers, delivery of goods to new markets);
- modernization of handcraft in competition to industrial mass production;
- need of supply with housing space and food;
- the demand for capital for private investments in small enterprises.

### **Cooperatives – ingenious European answer to epochal shifts**

For all these challenges the idea and practice of cooperatives have become an ingenious answer to the epochal shifts – shifts which in their epochal character are comparable to today.

From the European point of view, it is interesting that the modern concepts of cooperatives have never been limited to national ideology. The movement leading to farm cooperatives, trading and consumer cooperatives and mutual saving banks has been a European movement inspired by various protagonists in different countries, e.g. by Robert Owen (1771-1858) and William King (1786-1865) in the United Kingdom, by Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and Charles Fourier (1772-1837) in France and by Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch (1808-1883) and Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen (1818-1886) in Germany (Faust 1977).

Their concepts were usually based on regional references. This makes cooperatives interesting also for today facing the enduring competition between regional, national, European and global dimensions of policies. The modern idea of cooperatives has to face and it faces developments of the international economies but it combines transnational perspectives with the anchoring in regional structures and traditions.

- Searching for the characteristics and the specifics of the cooperative idea and self-conception we can detect a triple role:
  - “As economic actors, they create opportunities for jobs, livelihoods and income generation.
- As people-centered enterprises with social goals, they contribute to social equity and justice.
- As democratic institutions, they are controlled by their members, playing a leading role in society and local communities” ([www.ica.coop](http://www.ica.coop)).

Thus cooperatives are combining private engagement of many equal participants with individual *and* social benefit. They help to transform the modern idea and utopia of liberty, equality, and brotherliness into an effective operative form which is characterized by the combination of common private ownership and collective decision. This leads to an economic democracy often based on the principle that every member has one vote independent from the number of shares he or she holds. Therefore the idea of stakeholders and the principle of shareholders seem to be balanced very well.

Cooperatives as a fundamental anthropological strategy of organizing society and as an ingenious answer to the shifts in the upcoming modern society have become very successful in the last two hundred years. According to the data of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) in Brussels 1.2 billion people are organized in 3 million cooperatives in 109 countries representing 10 % of the entire employed population in the world ([www.ica.coop](http://www.ica.coop)).

### **Counterforce of cooperatives**

But there have also been strong counterforces in the divided world after World War II. On the one hand, there has been the ideological experience in countries of the „real existing socialism“, where unfree cooperatives were used

infamously as instruments of state capitalism. Therefore the notion and the experience of cooperatives seemed to be contaminated in the post-socialist countries. Confronted with the actual crises of refugees Ivan Krastev, Chief of the Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, noticed the fundamental different historical experience within Europe. In the eastern countries, he underlined the forced experience e.g. of cosmopolitanism as an ideological decree of the state (Krastev 2017). Cooperatives as well have been a victim of such an ideological abuse. On the other hand in the capitalist countries cooperatives, however, have been offended by the global dynamics. Considered as slow in taking a decision, inflexible in developing new products and new markets and regionally limited they seemed to be restricted to small niches of the economic and social life.

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are confronted with new epochal shifts as globalization, monopolization, and digitization just to mention some of the most important ones. They are leading to dangerous divisions between rich and poor people, urban and rural spaces, active and passive participants in the social and political discourse. In this context, my leading questions are: Can cooperatives help to integrate people in searching and finding solutions in order to manage the new epochal shifts? Can they also take an important role in the cultural field and especially concerning cultural heritage?

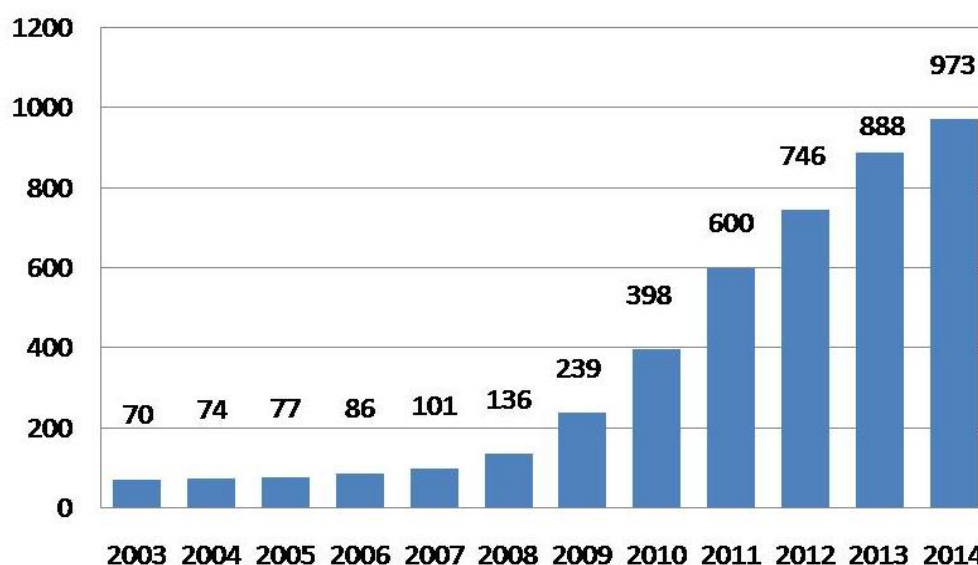
### **Renaissance of Cooperatives**

In fact, we can recognize a renaissance of cooperatives in the last decade. To give some indicators:

- Cooperative saving banks were not so much concerned by the financial crises since 2007 because they were rarely tempted to invest in the big deals of global financing and in the spoiled packages of the housing bubble;
- the danger of the climate change and the consequences of the nuclear disasters (Chernobyl 1986, Fukushima 2011) have demanded broad and effective counteractions with the commitment of many citizens which has led in Germany to the foundation of many energy cooperatives in order to establish a local and secure system of the power supply by renewable

energy. So from 2003 to 2014, the number of energy cooperatives has increased by more than 1.000 % – from 70 to 973 cooperatives (Figure 1);

- new German and European laws have strengthened the idea of cooperatives and facilitated to found them. On the European level the legal form of the *Societas Cooperativa Europea* (SCE) was established in 2006 in order to enable cooperatives with members in different countries of the EU.



**Figure 1: Foundation of Energy Cooperatives in Germany 2003 – 2014 (Agency for Renewable Energy, Klaus Novy Institut)**

Since 2006 when the amendment of the Cooperative Societies Act was accepted 2.648 new cooperatives were founded in Germany (Thürling 2018, p.26). Instead of their classic domains in agriculture, housing, consuming and banking these cooperatives are addressing new tasks, especially in energy supply as mentioned, in different services, and in the health sector (Haunstein/Thürling 2017: p.1). And there are more and more cooperatives oriented in community work (Figure 2). Every sixth of the new cooperatives are belonging to this group. They are caring about culture and sports, local supply of consumer goods, social needs and spatial development. Mostly they were founded in rural areas and at places where the market nor local authorities were capable to find appropriate solutions for civil needs. This group of cooperatives has to be taken especially into focus when looking for chances of cooperatives in cultural heritage management.



**Figure 2: Foundation of Cooperatives for Community Work 2007-2015 in Germany (© Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde e.V.)**

## Challenges of Cultural Heritage Management

An impressive number of new cooperatives and thousands of members is one argument for the potential of a cooperative approach, the other one has to be searched in specific answers to general problems of social, political and economic development, in this case of cultural heritage management of today. In this context I would like to focus on two prior problems: on the one hand the questions of how to preserve a vast number of cultural monuments and especially how to finance their preservation within the conflicts of different interests and on the other hand how to save a traditional cultural infrastructure which is threatened in many places especially in rural areas.

The main conflict is coming up with two facts – a huge number of cultural monuments and the still increasing requirement of space for housing and industries. The obvious idea to use historic monuments for actual housing

needs normally does not fit because of the costs and because of a struggle of interests and potentials between the different stakeholders (Figure 3).

Stakeholders	Positive aspects	Negative aspects
Public authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ conservation and maintenance of the monument</li> <li>■ public access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ lack of sufficient resources</li> <li>■ opportunity costs by renouncement on other political projects</li> <li>■ loss of the monument in case of prioritization of other projects and failure of alternative solutions</li> </ul>
Private investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ allocation of private equity and resources</li> <li>■ new ideas for using</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the danger of loss of historical substance by inappropriate restoration or using</li> <li>■ deprivation of public access</li> </ul>
Civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ allocation of private equity and resources</li> <li>■ the solution for civic demands</li> <li>■ public access</li> <li>■ participation of citizens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ extended political process because of many participants</li> <li>■ limited financial and economic capacity</li> </ul>

**Figure 3: Struggle of interests and approaches in handling historic monuments**

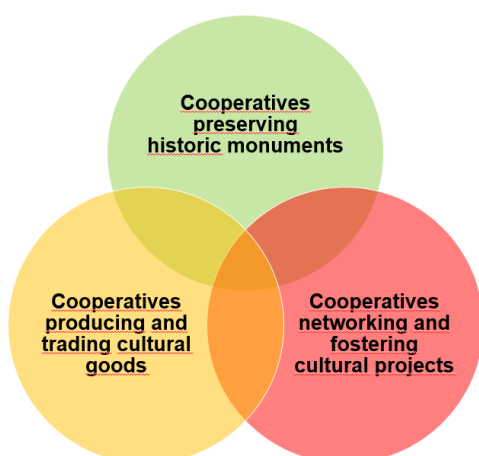
For the public authorities the main goals in handling historic monuments are conservation and maintenance of the buildings and in case of an eminent cultural meaning to allow public access. But because of a lack of sufficient resources and the concurrence of other political projects they are obliged to look for private investors with private equity. Often this may be a solution for the preserving of monuments but it can be combined with negative aspects especially with the danger of loss of historical substance if the restoration or later using is inappropriate and often a public access is no longer given. In this case, the engagement of the civil society organized in associations, civil foundations or cultural cooperatives can offer new and better paths. In addition, they can help to preserve or to reanimate fundamental cultural institutions which are no longer able to survive in common ways.

## Examples for Cooperatives preserving Cultural Heritage in Germany<sup>2</sup>

The term of cultural cooperatives is a diffuse term, it is not strictly to define as it is in the case of agricultural, credit, consumer or housing cooperatives. Cultural cooperatives can act in different sectors. They can act in the property market if they plan urban spaces with a special cultural mixture, they can work as a producer cooperative if they are editing a newspaper or are running a theatre. They can also act as creditors if they are financing cultural projects in order to realize promising artistic ideas. They can be agencies for all sorts of cultural purposes. The only connecting idea which brings us to speak about cultural cooperatives is their decided cultural concern and the legal form they are organized in.

Today in Germany about 8.500 associations are organized in the legal form of cooperatives (Stappel 2015, p. 39). Examining this list up to 100 can be considered to act as cultural cooperatives which are dedicated to preserve cultural monuments and cultural infrastructure or to establish new cooperation in the cultural sector.

From the point of view of cultural heritage management cultural cooperatives can be characterized in different types (Figure 4):



**Figure 4: Different types of cultural cooperatives with regard to Cultural Heritage Management**

<sup>2</sup> A growing list of cultural cooperatives in Germany can be found on the Website of the University of Education, Institute of Cultural Management Ludwigsburg: [www.kulturmanagement.ph-ludwigsburg.de](http://www.kulturmanagement.ph-ludwigsburg.de).



□ **Cooperatives preserving historic monuments:**

Preserving historic monuments can often be found as the initial impulse for many cooperatives as for example in the case of Schloss Tonndorf eG ([www.schloss-tonndorf.de](http://www.schloss-tonndorf.de)), a cooperative which was founded in 2005 in order to restore the Castle of Tonndorf situated in Thuringia and to constitute a community of about 60 members which lives and works together in a vivid exchange with the neighbourhood. Functionally the cooperative use the castle in its former way as a place of housing and a center of farming and trade but politically the monument was transformed from the feudal system to a democratic and solidary economy.

□ **Cooperatives producing and trading cultural goods:**

Cultural cooperatives connected to or located in historic monuments are normally combining the preservation of the building with a special cultural function which can be defined in the narrow meaning of art production or in the broader sense of everyday life. They are protecting tangible cultural heritage and at the same time they are preserving cultural traditions or supplying communities with services and consumer goods by maintaining

- theatres as in Hamburg ([www.engelsaal.de](http://www.engelsaal.de)) or Ansbach ([www.theater-ansbach.de](http://www.theater-ansbach.de));
- cinemas as in Aalen ([www.kino-am-kocher.de](http://www.kino-am-kocher.de)) or Würzburg ([www.central-programmkino.de](http://www.central-programmkino.de));
- historic village inns as in the Black Forrest ([www.dasrosessle.de](http://www.dasrosessle.de)) or in Asten ([www.wirtshaus-asten.de](http://www.wirtshaus-asten.de));
- retail shops as in Tübingen ([www.loewen-laden.de](http://www.loewen-laden.de)) or Altenhagen ([www.dorf-kultur-erbe.de](http://www.dorf-kultur-erbe.de));
- old breweries often located in Bavaria ([www.langbraeu.de](http://www.langbraeu.de); [www.brauerei-oberhaching.de](http://www.brauerei-oberhaching.de));
- former railway stations nowadays used as cultural centers as in Leutkirch ([www.leutkircher-buergerbahnhof.de](http://www.leutkircher-buergerbahnhof.de)).

These cooperatives are often but not necessarily located in historic monuments. They are preserving cultural heritage e.g. the tradition of newspapers as well when they are working in recent buildings. This is the case with the daily newspaper “die tageszeitung” ([www.taz.de](http://www.taz.de)), which is organized already since 1992 in a cooperative. At that time it has come to a serious financial crisis and the journal would not have survived if it had not changed its legal status. Today more than 17.000 members are forming the

cooperative with an equity of more than 15 million Euros ([www.taz.de](http://www.taz.de)). They guarantee economic and political independence and a stable basis of readers in a journalistic surrounding which is losing more and more user every day (Bröckers/Sontheimer 2012).

□ **Cooperatives networking and fostering cultural projects**

The third type of cultural cooperatives is not preserving historic monuments or producing cultural goods by itself but building a network for lobbying and fostering cultural initiatives or educational projects. The Berlin Music Commission eG (BMC) is such a cooperative founded in 2007 by 17 members in Berlin ([www.berlin-music-commission.de](http://www.berlin-music-commission.de)). It unites institutions and enterprises from different parts of the music production and services such as live entertainment, recorded music, music technology or music media. Its main goal is to represent and to boost the music industry in the German capital in order to improve the conditions of producing music and to optimize the supply chain. Following the tradition of cooperatives, BMC is always asked to make an appearance if the members are not able to act individually for themselves. Common participation at international fairs or a common marketing campaign for “Summer of Berlin”, a series of concerts and music events, are examples for its work to strengthen the public attention, to decrease the necessary costs for the promotion and to foster the collaboration between the members. In consequence, 400 music enterprises from Berlin have joined for the Project “MUSIC 2020 BERLIN”, a master plan to preserve and develop the infrastructure, to boost research, to bring forth offspring and strengthen the international promotion of the music scene in Berlin). The model of the cooperative was chosen by BMC in order to unite a fragmented industry and to combine professional work with participation, transparency, and reliability (Wieg 2012).

The idea of networking and collaborating by forming a cooperative can also be transferred to the task of cultural heritage management as it did the Cooperative for the Culture of the Baroque in Upper Swabia ([www.barockzentrum.de](http://www.barockzentrum.de)). Constituted by experts for baroque music, baroque architecture, baroque art and lifestyle and combined with tour guides and representatives of the regional tourism it is forming a vehicle for local cooperation especially in services and a platform for a common marketing of the members.

## Examples in other European Countries

The foundation of cultural cooperatives especially dedicated to the preserving of cultural heritage seems to be an extraordinary trend in Germany but it is not limited to it. To give some indications for other European countries:

- In Switzerland, we have the famous example of the Migros Cooperative which decided already in 1957 to spend 1 % of the turnover (not the profit!) for cultural purposes. Thus about 120 million € per year are expended for public benefit in culture, education and leisure projects. From 1957 to 2014 the whole amount of expenditure cumulated up to 4 billion Euros and it is going on year after year ([www.migros-culture-percentage.ch](http://www.migros-culture-percentage.ch)).
- In France, there is e.g. the Wine Cooperative Sieur d'Arques ([www.sieurdarques.com](http://www.sieurdarques.com)) in the neighborhood of Carcassonne with 2000 ha of vineyard organizing every year a charity auction in favor of bell towers in the villages nearby in order to preserve historical heritage and local architecture. The auction has become a major event in the wine world combined with benefit dinners of the best known French cooks and a big festival attracting 30.000 people with an annual support of about 500.000 Euros for the restoration of a bell tower.
- In the United Kingdom, we can refer to a website of the City University of London listing and discussing a respectable number of cultural cooperatives ([www.cultural.coop](http://www.cultural.coop)). It is, however, less dedicated to cooperative initiatives of cultural heritage management but to the question of fighting precarity in the cultural sector with co-operation (Sandoval 2016, 2018).

## Structures and Strategies

At the beginning of many cooperatives founded in Germany for cultural purposes in a broader sense and especially for the preserving and development of cultural heritage we can register a need which could not be covered sufficiently by the public authorities or by the market. Therefore civic engagement has taken the task to preserve historic buildings, to assume responsibility for old inns and breweries, to maintain theatres and cinemas, to publish newspapers or to transform former railways stations into community centers. These new cooperatives are located in urban spaces as well as in rural areas. Many of them are less oriented towards economic success but towards

the quality of life, individual fulfillment and self-government. With regard to the regional distribution in Germany a gap is observable between east and west and north and south indicating that the civic engagement in cooperatives is linked to the regional GDP and local income as well as to the demographic and social situation, to the circumstances of employment, and the competitive ability of the community (Thürling 2018, p. 26). Therefore cooperatives may be “children of misery” as often labeled but they will overcome the misery only if a minimum of resources are given including people who are able and willing to spend personal resources as time, money, ideas and network in order to found and manage a cooperative.

This assumed cultural cooperatives can offer a lot of advantages and chances:

- They can help to rise equity to preserve cultural heritage. In Tübingen within half a year 500 members were willing to finance the coop shop in a historic monument with 100.000 € ([www.loewen-laden.de](http://www.loewen-laden.de)); in a village in the Black Forrest 166 members were able to raise 305.000 € to buy and renovate an old inn ([www.dasroessle.de](http://www.dasroessle.de)).
- The engagement in a cooperative is normally linked to a new spirit in a community where the coop is situated. This spirit is characterized by solidarity in order to solve common interests and it is based on the principle of equal participation. By this democratic decision making and participatory government can be strengthened in local communities.
- Cultural heritage can only be preserved for a longer term if it is revitalized by vital and regular usage. Cooperatives are predestined for this because they are combining offers and demands in their cooperative system. The members of a coop restoring and running an old inn is not only a sort of collective landlords, they are also clients guaranteeing the own economic success. In order to enlarge their community cultural cooperatives in addition are sometimes founding separately registered associations. They help to finance or organize the running tasks.
- Cooperatives do not only have to be considered as a makeshift for needs and services which cannot be covered by public authorities or the market. They can also be taken as partners in multi-stakeholder-cooperatives combining civic engagement with public funding thus forming a new system of a public-private-partnership. First examples of such a combination are already existing (Thürling 2018, p. 27).

The forms of constructing cultural cooperatives and the chances they offer are hardly limited. New ideas and new examples are emerging in many places. Their performances, strategies, and benefits have just to be taken in regard.

### **The necessity of comparative research**

The idea and practice of cooperatives are well known for thousands of years. Cooperatives as a special legal form have been established about 150 years ago in Europe and since then it has spread all over the world. But the purpose to care about cultural heritage and to boost cultural activities is rather new and it is various in the different countries of Europe. Therefore the capacities of cultural cooperatives are not yet well explored. What we need is a further comparative research. The questions of research could be:

- To which extent can cooperatives be considered to be an effective means of the cultural industries, of cultural policies, and especially of cultural heritage management?
- Which traditions, actual political initiatives, and legal conditions can be found in different countries of Europe?
- Which factors of success and potential barriers can be carved out by empirical researches?
- How can be described the correlation between objectives (e.g. preserving cultural monuments), participation, economic success and public benefit?
- How can cooperatives be considered in comparison to other legal forms of civic engagement as foundations or registered associations?
- Is it possible to develop models of cultural (heritage) management by cooperatives?

To find answers to all these questions first of all a broad empirical database has to be established. It will allow to develop a catalog of different types and tasks of cooperatives, to evaluate their economic and cultural importance in different countries and to estimate their potential to realize the principles which have been at the origin of the movement of cooperatives and which are asked today again – not as a significant sign of neoliberal ideology but as a means of participatory government in times of deep changes: self-help, self-government and self-responsibility.

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