

Worker Empowerment through Multi-Stakeholder Governance? A Solidarity
Co-operative Case Study

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Abstract

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Multi-stakeholder co-operatives (MSCs), which allow for multiple parties (both consumer and worker, for example) to share in governance, have come to define a number of regional co-operative models worldwide and are often characterized as particularly inclusive and capable of expanding the democratic capacity of the co-operative movement. In Quebec, the solidarity cooperative—a multi-stakeholder model through which ownership is divided between multiple parties including workers, consumers, and “supporting members” who often represent other organizations —has proliferated significantly in the last several decades and directly encourages the formation of networks across the social economy through its unique governance structure. In addition to the strengths of this model, a number of challenges and tensions arise from its hybridization of worker and consumer co-operative models. This master's thesis examines these tensions from a worker's perspective using a participant observation case study of The Hive Café, a solidarity cooperative operating out of Concordia University in downtown Montreal. Both formal and informal divisions between workers and other groups within solidarity cooperative governance are explored with the aim of extracting insights useful to those seeking to build socially-oriented economic alternatives.

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~

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~

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1.0 Introduction

Within Canada, Quebec's co-operative sector is uniquely large and prosperous, as it contains 44.4% of the country's co-operatives—more than twice as many as any other province (Statistics Canada, 2021). Including financial co-operatives, Quebec's co-operative sector accounts for 14.5% of the province's total GDP with \$52 billion in annual revenue (Conseil québécois de la coopération et de la mutualité, 2021). While there are many social, political, and historical factors that contribute to the strength of Quebec's co-operative sector, a unique cooperative model, the solidarity cooperative, also sets it apart. This relatively new, regional model is a form of multi-stakeholder co-operative (MSC), in which governance and ownership is shared between several parties—consumers, workers, producers, etc.—rather than just one. While MSCs exist elsewhere in Canada, solidarity co-operatives are unique in two respects. First, they have unique parameters that are codified in Quebec law, including the inclusion of “supporting members,” a broad category that can include anyone with “an economic, social or cultural interest in the pursuit of the objects of the cooperative” (Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, 1997). Second, they have taken hold in Quebec in a way that MSCs in the rest of Canada have not: solidarity co-operatives are the fastest growing type of co-operative in the province (Lund, 2011) and, despite having only emerged in the last 25 years, have come to outnumber other, more traditional types of co-operative, including worker co-operatives and producer co-operatives (Ministère des Finances et de l'Économie du Québec, 2013). Solidarity

co-operatives have proven to be highly adaptable, growing in a variety of sectors, and, in part through their inclusion of supporting members, have been able to form networks with other socially-oriented organizations, including other co-operatives, further strengthening Quebec's social economy.

Despite the strengths of the solidarity model, its novel approach to co-operative governance raises a number of questions. Do workers and consumers have inherently conflicting agendas? What are the implications of including supporting members, who do not directly use the services of a co-operative, in their governance structures? In a co-operative with distinct types of member, what imbalances emerge along these lines? This thesis explores the dynamics between solidarity co-operative members through a case study of the Montreal-based Hive Café Solidarity Co-operative, a primarily student-run organization that offers healthy, sustainable, and low-cost food across Concordia University's two campuses. In particular, this thesis examines the challenges faced by worker members in navigating and participating within solidarity co-operative governance.

My involvement with The Hive began before this research project, when I became employed by the organization in the Fall of 2017. My first position was as an assistant chef, preparing large quantities of food in an off-site production kitchen before it was delivered to The Hive Café's two locations. After a year, I took a position as a barista at the downtown location, where I continued to work until being laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020. I have also held a number of volunteer positions within the organizational structure of The Hive. I was elected to the board of directors as a worker member representative in 2019 and have at various points been

the Vice President of the board, chair of the Human Resources Committee, a member of the Food Committee, and a member of several ad-hoc hiring committees.

I initially applied to work at The Hive, in part, because it is a co-op. Although I had no prior direct experience with co-ops, several of my friends had lived in housing co-operatives and I was attracted to the sense of social solidarity they described to me. Additionally, I had worked a series of minimum wage jobs in the retail and food service sectors and was looking for an alternative to the typical employer-employee relationship that I often found to be exploitative.

Despite my expectations, my first year at The Hive was marked by long hours, low pay, strained relationships with those in supervisory roles, little autonomy over my workplace, and a sense of disconnection from other employees of The Hive. I found the governance structure of the organization to be confusing and impenetrable. Why was my experience so different from what I had anticipated? Was the issue with this co-op in particular, this *type* of co-op, or co-ops in general? These questions that I had begun to ask myself while sweeping up at the end of my shifts were the initial seeds of this research project.

These curiosities sparked a years-long journey that resulted not only in this thesis, but also in my own rise through the ranks of The Hive, a greater embeddedness in and understanding of Quebec's social economy, and the formation of many personal and professional relationships. It is in this same spirit of growth that this inquiry is undertaken with the aims of improving workers' democratic participation in their workplaces and increasing the utility of the solidarity co-operative as a means to a more economically just society.

This thesis is organized as follows: first, Chapter 2 will provide an overview of literature on the goals of the broader co-operative movement and social economy, critiques of co-operative models, the spatial strategies employed by MSCs, the co-operative movement in Quebec, the “stakeholder discourse” that informs solidarity co-operatives, and the limits of this model in particular. Next, in Chapter 3, this project’s research questions and the methodology used to investigate them are presented. Chapter 4 provides an outline of the case study—The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative—including its history and structure. Chapter 5 is composed of a discussion and analysis of the data collected during the research process, including on dynamics between formal and informal categories of solidarity co-operative member. Finally, Chapter 6 offers some concluding reflections on the key contributions of this study, in addition to the paths for future research that it presents.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Co-operatives and the Social Economy

Co-operatives are often defined in open-ended terms that encompass a wide variety of possibilities and configurations. The International Co-operative Alliance defines them as “people-centred enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realise their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations” (International Co-operative Alliance, 2018). The Canadian government’s official definition is similarly ambiguous and omits any mention of social aims altogether: “A co-operative is a legally incorporated corporation that is owned by an association of persons seeking to satisfy common needs such as access to products or services, sale of their products or services, or employment” (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2018). Exactly which people are centred in these “people-centred” enterprises is open to interpretation and dependent on the type of cooperative in question. These broad definitions are inclusive of the many forms of cooperatives—worker, producer, and consumer cooperatives, among others—that exist in many sectors of the economy including agriculture, housing, industrial production, services, finance, and the arts. As a result, cooperatives can exist both within and in opposition to many different political, economic, and social frameworks sometimes simultaneously and with varying degrees of coherence and cohesion. Despite these differences, co-operatives are linked together through a set of 7 internationally recognized principles—often referred to as the Rochdale principles, after the Northern

English town in which they were conceived in 1844—that encourage voluntary membership, democratic member control, the economic participation of members, co-operation among different co-operatives, autonomy, education, and community involvement (International Cooperative Alliance, 2018).

For their proponents, cooperatives present a more just and democratic form of ownership than models stemming from private ownership that are pervasive under contemporary capitalism. Cooperatives and other more socially oriented alternatives are increasingly relevant for those who seek to avoid replicating the ills of the market economy, such as income inequality and the exacerbation of climate change.

The viability of alternative economic forms, including co-operatives, is often examined within critical economic and urban geography (Marcuse, 2015). These economic alternatives are commonly understood as part of the social economy: a “third sector” outside both the state and the private sector that seeks to mitigate the effects of market capitalism and serve a social purpose (Amin, Cameron, & Hudson, 2002). In particular, the cooperative is heralded as an ideal model within the social economy due to its emphasis on workplace democracy via collective ownership, often by workers (Rothschild & Whitt, 1989). For these reasons, the co-operative has been an integral component of many transformative anti-capitalist projects of the left, both historical and contemporary.

Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci each wrote on the importance of cooperatives and workers’ councils as necessary steps for building socialism (Jossa, 2005; 2014). This idea was perhaps most notably put into practice in 1936 in Revolutionary Catalonia, where large swathes of the economy, including transportation, utilities,

telecommunications, and industrial production were operated by self-managed worker collectives associated with the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) (Dolgoff, 1974). In contemporary Spain, the Mondragon Corporation—one of Spain’s largest companies—operates as a federation of worker cooperatives in the Basque Autonomous Community in what is considered a model of longevity and growth within the social economy (Whyte & Whyte, 1991). Worker cooperatives are also central to the revolutionary projects of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico (Sampaio, 2004) and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in Rojava (Küçük & Özselçuk, 2016). In a Canadian context, agricultural cooperatives were central to (and the namesake of) the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the democratic socialist precursor to the New Democratic Party (NDP) (Quarter, 1992).

The common thread running through these examples is that the cooperative has served a central function within transformative political projects; a means of reproducing and reinforcing the economies of societies that seek an alternative to capitalism. Today, cooperatives are widespread and exist alongside market-oriented enterprises in a wide variety of sectors and geographical contexts. In many instances, cooperatives and other social economic enterprises occupy significant proportions of regional markets and have been mainstreamed within advanced capitalist economies, including in regions of Spain and Italy (Iuviene, Stitely & Hoyt 2010).

Although the cooperative is still used as a tool for radical social and economic transformation today, it has been enveloped into the broad category of the social economy, which manifests in a wide variety of forms dependent on political-economic contexts, sometimes in seemingly contradictory ways. For example, the term “solidarity

economy” is often used broadly as a synonym for the social economy—which is often integrated into the mainstream market economy—in developed countries with strong welfare states such as France and Canada, whereas in “left-leaning countries with weak market economies... [solidarity economy] has begun to stand for post-capitalist possibility” (Amin, 2013, p.16).

The difference between the social economy and the solidarity economy is further complicated in Quebec. Although the social economy can be neoliberal and reinforce social exclusion (CIRIEC-Canada, 1998), Vaillancourt & Favreau (2000) note that in order for a social economic enterprise to become a solidarity economic enterprise, its goals must explicitly include social and economic transformation and be embedded within broader social movements. Despite this distinction made by scholars working in Quebec, confusion may arise regarding solidarity cooperatives, which are not inherently part of the solidarity economy. The Cooperatives Act, which outlines the legal requirements for organizations to be recognized as solidarity cooperatives in Quebec, says nothing about social movements or economic transformation. Therefore, solidarity cooperatives in Quebec, like other types of cooperatives in the province or elsewhere, may or may not be part of the solidarity economy depending on a variety of factors. However, to those not familiar with the intricacies of Quebec legislation and labour scholarship, solidarity cooperatives may be automatically associated with the solidarity economy due to the connotations of the term “solidarity”, both in a broad cultural sense (“Solidarity Forever”) and regionally (the political party Quebec Solidaire) in a way that has potentially allowed this model to fly relatively under the critical radar.

2.2 Limitations of the Co-operative Model

Cooperatives often face criticism regarding their viability within market economies. These criticisms generally fall into two categories: those that critique cooperatives for deviating too far from the market economy and those that fault cooperatives for their acquiescence to the market economy. Critiques that fall into the former category often take aim at cooperatives' shortcomings in the areas of marketing and branding (Beverland, 2007) or overinvestment in the decision-making process (Leviten-Reid & Fairbairn, 2011). These types of criticisms demonstrate how alternative economic discourses put forward by the cooperative movement have been “rendered ineffectual by the hegemony of capitalocentrism” (Gibson-Graham, 2003, p. 57)—the overwhelming dominance of the market economy—and are often viewed as “non-credible alternatives to what exists” (Santos, 2004, p. 238).

Critiques of the latter type highlight the ways cooperatives tend to reproduce the structures of the economic framework they exist within, especially in terms of worker-manager dynamics (Kasmir, 1996) and governance structures (Paranque & Willmott, 2014). Despite being positioned as an economic alternative to traditional forms of capitalism, even the most successful cooperatives are highly subject to the external forces of the market economy and pressures to attain greater profitability and efficiency (Gibson-Graham, 2003). Although cooperatives often have goals—explicit or implicit—to subvert dominant capitalist forms of labour relations, they paradoxically must operate in accordance with these same frameworks on the path to achieving their

goals, or as Marx (1894, p. 570) puts it in Volume 3 of *Capital*, cooperatives “reproduce... in their present organization, all the defects of the existing system”.

The tensions and degree of incommensurability between the competing economic and social aims of cooperatives is a subject that has long occupied economists (Chomel & Vienney, 1996; Levi & Davis, 2008). In his appraisal of the role of cooperatives in building socialism, urban planner Peter Marcuse (2015) notes the inevitability of cooperatives to “self-exploit” under immense external market pressure, constantly balancing the liberatory aspects of the cooperative project with the contrary necessities of competition and marketing required to stay afloat within the broader context of capitalism. Similar observations have been made by critics of what has been dubbed the “non-profit industrial complex” (NPIC). In particular, attention has been drawn to the ways dominant neoliberal economic frameworks have come to shape the operations and impede the social goals of a variety of wide-ranging non-profit operations (Finley, Esposito, & Hall, 2012). This process often involves non-profits carrying out the roles previously filled by the now diminished welfare state, resulting in a non-profit “shadow state” that carries out social welfare via businesses and other privatized means (Gilmore, 2007; Mananzala & Spade, 2008).

Nyssens (2007) stresses the importance of political context on social enterprise and notes that the “dynamic of institutionalization can lead to... a movement of ‘isomorphism’ on the part of social enterprises, towards... for-profit enterprises” (p. 11). In *The Myth of Mondragon*, a book that explores these contradictions as they manifest within Spain’s Mondragon Corporation—one of the world’s largest cooperatives—author Sharryn Kasmir (1996) outlines the impacts of the depoliticization and

institutionalization of cooperatives: “The implication... is that economic justice is brought about by a form of business rather than by social classes engaged in political action” (p. 18). The elimination of politics from the institutionalized cooperative project allows a region’s social economy to grow relatively unencumbered by the inherent tension between labour power and capital. However, these apolitical appearances require constant maintenance through deft public relations and self-mythologizing:

“Workers' feelings and experiences are often at odds with those of managers, yet managers' points of view are those that are reported in the popular and scholarly literature [on cooperatives].” (Kasmir, 1996, p. 11)

Within a framework of marketized competition, those in managerial roles within co-operatives, especially those seeking to maintain viability at a large-scale, are incentivized to emphasize efficiency and stability while downplaying the political underpinnings of the cooperative movement and the inherent tensions with the market economy with which it must coexist. This impulse is not only a means of “keeping up” with non-co-operative competitors, but also a way of conveying political neutrality to the state, with which co-operatives—especially large, institutionalized co-operatives—are often financially entangled with/dependent on.

2.3 Multi-Stakeholder Co-operatives and Spatial Strategies of the Social Economy

The benefits of cooperatives are often expressed in spatial terms. According to Girard & Langlois (2009), “the belief that the co-operative model was the best organizational model to maintain a close link between the economy and the territory” (p.235) is widespread on an international level. There are a variety of reasons for this view, including the creation of cooperatives by local actors (rather than international business interests and financiers), the tendency for the scale of cooperative enterprises to remain fixed to the scale of the territory in which they operate, and the ability of cooperatives to maintain the localization of their capital (Draperi, 2003, p. 391).

Creating networks within the social economy, including among cooperatives, is a strategy often used in limiting the external influence of the market economy (Neamtan, 2002). In some cases, cooperatives form strategic alliances akin to business mergers in order to offset the effects of similar consolidation among market-oriented competitors (Vandeburg, Fulton, Hine & McNamara 2004). Indeed, the longevity and growth of Italy’s Legacoop and the aforementioned Mondragon Corporation, which employ over 1,000,000 and 85,000 workers in cooperative structures respectively, has been attributed to this network strategy (Iuviene, Stitely & Hoyt 2010).

Although the cooperative model is often associated with worker self-management, cooperative ownership can be held by a number of parties: workers, producers, consumers, and tenants (in the case of housing cooperatives), among others. Although these different types of cooperative ownership frameworks are often

discrete, a hybrid model of multi-stakeholder cooperatives (MSCs), in which ownership is shared by two or more parties, has taken particular hold in a number of regions, including Italy and Quebec (Lund, 2011), where multi-stakeholder co-operatives are known as social co-operatives and solidarity co-operatives, respectively. This model aims to address the needs of multiple constituencies and has produced a number of examples of longstanding, profitable enterprises such as Eroski, a Basque supermarket chain that is a hybrid worker-consumer co-op, and iCoop, a Korean food systems co-op that uses a hybrid consumer-producer governance structure (Birchall & Sacchetti, 2017).

By their very design, MSCs are able to form links across the social economy and take advantage of the strength of networks. In a study of MSCs within the food and agriculture sector, Gonzalez (2017) speaks to the aims of this strategy: “Their networks with other social movements reveal how [MSCs] are trying to change, rather than adapt to the market economies they struggle to survive in.” (p. 278). These networks link MSCs in this sector to a wide array of social movements including “open data and open economy communities, solidarity economy, food sovereignty and organic movements” (p. 281).

Networks among co-operatives are also widespread throughout Quebec’s thriving social economy, in many cases formalized through institutional bodies that link co-operatives and other social economic enterprises together. These include the La Fédération québécoise des coopératives de santé (FQCS), which links together 44 health co-operatives across 14 of Quebec’s 17 administrative regions, and Le Conseil québécois des entreprises adaptées (CQEA), which provides employment to people

living within disabilities through a network of 36 co-operatives and non-profits. The Chantier de l'économie sociale, a group that arose from the 1996 Summit on the Economy and Employment, is a key facilitator of these networks within Quebec, as it seeks to “[b]ring together the main stakeholders of the social economy movement in Québec in order to create favourable conditions” and “[f]acilitate links, sharing of best practices, and discussions among the movement’s various components.” Notably, the Chantier de l'économie sociale facilitates the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec (RISQ), Quebec’s first non-profit venture capital fund dedicated exclusively to the social economy, which has provided millions of dollars in loans to co-operatives across the province (Neamtan, 2005).

2.4 Quebec and the Solidarity Co-operative Model

Quebec is “home to one of the most productive and vibrant cooperative development sectors in the world” (Lund, 2011, p. 1) and in terms of social economic development is “a model for other regions in Canada and in many regions and countries internationally” (Mendell, 2013, p. 177). Quebec has a workforce that is over 40% unionized, and institutional apparatuses such as the aforementioned *Chantier de l'économie sociale* and the *Réseau d'investissement social du Québec* (RISQ), in addition to other advocacy groups such as *le Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre de l'économie sociale et de l'action communautaire* (CSMO-ÉSAC), are among a number of organizations that contribute to the province’s strong social economy by providing

financial support and political advocacy to the cooperative sector (Mendell & Neamtan, 2010). Quebec contains a number of large, internationally regarded co-op projects in multiple sectors including La Communauté Milton Parc (the largest housing co-op in North America), The Desjardins Group (the largest federation of credit unions in North America), and Sollio Cooperative Group (the largest agricultural co-op in Canada). The unique conditions of Quebec's social economy arise in part from a number of historical events, such as the Quiet Revolution, which brought about broad social changes to the province in the 1960s and the 1996 Quebec Economic and Job Summit (Bouchard, 2013; Diamantopoulos, 2011) prompted in part by the anti-poverty and women's movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s (D'Amours, 2002), which saw the genesis of the solidarity co-operative, Quebec's regional version of the multi-stakeholder co-operative.

The governance structure of solidarity co-operatives is legally enshrined in the province's Cooperatives Act, which mandates that any such cooperative must be comprised of at least two of three ownership groups: user members (consumers), worker members, and supporting members—any other party that has “an economic, social or cultural interest in the pursuit of the objects of the cooperative” (Cooperatives Act, 2015, section 226.1). For descriptions of each type of member, as they are defined in the Cooperatives Act, see Table 1.

Table 1: Composition of Solidarity Cooperatives

Type of Member	Worker Members	User Members	Supporting Members
Description	“worker members, that is, natural persons who are workers of the cooperative”	“user members, that is, persons or partnerships that are users of the services provided by the cooperative as producers or consumers”	“supporting members, that is, any other person or partnership that has an economic, social or cultural interest in the pursuit of the objects of the cooperative”
Stipulations	“Where the membership of a solidarity cooperative includes only... workers, the Minister may order that the cooperative amend its articles to withdraw itself from the application of this Title”	“Where the membership of a solidarity cooperative includes only users... the Minister may order that the cooperative amend its articles to withdraw itself from the application of this Title”	“supporting members... shall not exceed one-third of the total number of directors of the cooperative”

C-67.2: Cooperatives Act, Title II, Chapter VII

Solidarity co-ops are the fastest growing type of co-operative in the province (Lund, 2011) with over 2000 solidarity cooperatives emerging from 1997-2004 alone (Girard, 2004). Early solidarity co-ops in Quebec were largely in the sectors of rural service provision, health care, and home care. Girard & Langlois (2009) describe the motivations behind one of these early solidarity co-ops, many of which were located in rural areas:

“In St-Tharcisius, an isolated area in the Gaspé region of Quebec, citizens who were confronted by the closure of all essential services decided to set up a solidarity co-operative to deliver basic proximity services such as a convenience store, oil and so on... Faced with decreasing populations, many villages began to lose their proximity services such as post offices, petrol stations and grocery stores. Their loss presented a very serious threat to the survival of many rural communities”.

Like other forms of multi-stakeholder co-operatives, the solidarity co-operative model has the previously described “network” strategy employed by many social economic enterprises embedded into its governance structure. Girard & Langlois (2009) describe how the solidarity co-operative model “reinforced the link between the co-operative and its surrounding local territory and community” (p. 231), citing one example in Mont Adstock, QC, where local residents mobilized to save the local ski resort from closure by pooling resources and managing it as a solidarity co-operative and another example in Gatineau, QC, where a group of doctors sold a clinic to the community in order to “reinforce local roots” (p. 231).

2.5 Stakeholder Discourse

The strengths of the multi-stakeholder model are often attributed to its ability to bring different parties together in the pursuit of a common goal. Researchers state that the diversity of members within the governance structures of MSCs—producers, consumers, workers, etc.—allows an organization to be democratically “vigorous and inclusive” (Lund, 2012, p. 38) or “ambidextrous” and innovative (Pérez, Perdomo, Farrow, Trienekens, & Omta, 2016). When compared to single-party co-operatives, MSCs are said to represent a “broadening [of] democratic voice” (Gray, 2014). A common premise in studies of MSCs is that heterogeneity is preferable to homogeneity and therefore more types of members in a co-op structure is better than a single type. Overviews of MSCs have stated that the “diversity and the flexibility” of this model ought to be an “inspiration for single category member co-operatives” (Vézina & Girard, 2014).

Although MSCs bring together groups with seemingly contrasting interests—for example, producers who want high prices for goods and consumers who want low prices—“a favorable élan of compromises” (Lund, 2011, p. 49) is said to be reached through the governance processes of MSCs. While this has allowed many MSCs to be long-lasting and profitable, does this compromise reproduce the very market dynamics that co-operatives have historically pushed against? The underlying logic of the MSC model is not entirely dissimilar to the concept of the invisible hand, a hallmark of free market economics that posits that economic agents acting in their own self-interest will result in an equilibrium between supply and demand and deliver the best possible social outcomes (Heath, 2016). Although direct deliberation between stakeholders within the

governance structures of MSCs is, as a process, certainly preferable to the so-called “miraculous” forces of the market, allowing wages to be set in relation to consumer pressure—however benevolent—belies the social aims of the cooperative movement, which would hold a living wage, for example, as an inherently desirable outcome, regardless of its impact of costs.

In urban planning, where public consultation with stakeholders is foundational to the practice of participatory planning, there is an increasing body of critical work on the notion of “the stakeholder”. Critics claim that it obscures important political differences between actors in the interest of creating the appearance of a more democratic process, with some going as far as claiming that “the Stakeholder Agenda is merely the latest adaptation of capital in its insatiable drive for new forms of urban development and profit” (Sandercock, 2005, p. 439). Purcell (2009) similarly highlights the naïve assumption that power dynamics are erased when stakeholders come together and warns that this model can be a way for “neoliberals to maintain hegemony while ensuring political stability” (p. 140). Even some proponents of stakeholder-oriented planning acknowledge that “stakeholders enter the process to serve their interests” (Innes, 2004, p. 14) rather than the common good.

Although these claims of neoliberal co-optation of stakeholder discourse may seem alarmist, they remain relevant today and resonate beyond the field of planning. Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, has written extensively about the concept of “stakeholder capitalism”, which was pitched to world leaders at the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The theme of the 2020 World Economic Forum was “Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World” and attendees, who

ranged from Donald Trump to Angela Merkel, were instructed that “business has now to fully embrace stakeholder capitalism” (World Economic Forum, 2020). Likewise, US Senator Elizabeth Warren’s proposed “Accountable Capitalism Act” would “requires corporate directors to consider the interests of all major corporate stakeholders” and would mandate that workers elect at least 40% of corporate boards of directors (Warren, 2018), echoing the language of proponents of both “stakeholder capitalism” and multi-stakeholder co-operatives.

In Canada, this discourse has recently made the jump from its usual liberal and “progressive” spheres to conservative politics. During the 2021 federal election, Erin O’Toole, leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, campaigned on a promise of requiring “federally regulated employers with over 1,000 employees or \$100 million in annual revenue to include worker representation on their boards of directors” (Conservative Party of Canada, 2021). University of Manitoba labour studies professor David Camfield criticizes this policy as a “superficial token change” that “would make no significant difference in how the firms to which it would apply would treat workers” (PressProgress, 2021), while Unifor national president Jerry Dias dismisses it more succinctly as “half-baked” and a gimmick (McGregor, 2021).

2.6 Challenges within Multistakeholder Governance and the Solidarity

Cooperative

Although there is much critical work on co-operatives, MSCs, and stakeholder discourse, the relatively recent emergence of the solidarity co-operative model in Quebec has left it somewhat understudied. A recent study of the governance structure of the solidarity cooperative has raised some critical questions, particularly pertaining to the role of supporting members, who represent an “organizational paradox” as they do not directly use the services of the co-operative, which has traditionally been a prerequisite for co-op membership (Michaud & Audebrand, 2018). The same study notes that “the diversity of the stakeholder base... [is] an advantage for and a threat to cooperatives’ sustainability” (p. 1393). A survey of a number of solidarity cooperatives in Quebec found that most are “not exceptional regarding their degree of democracy” (Girard & Langlois, 2009, p. 260) and that, in at least one case, “very low worker membership also has a direct effect on the degree of democracy, as the pool of members to be on the Board of Directors and to take part in other democratic activities is very limited”, pointing to prohibitive fees that prevent low-paid worker members from being involved within the leadership structure of the cooperative. Despite the insights of these works, scholars studying the solidarity co-operative model have called for further research into the challenges presented by its governance structure, particularly relating to the compromises made between different categories of members who hold competing interests (Girard, 2008).

Commenting on the history of the cooperative movement in Quebec at the Congress of the Institut d'histoire de l'Amerique francaise in 1976, Mario Dumais noted that while cooperatives do not inherently constitute an alternative to capitalism, an anti-capitalist movement could emerge in Quebec through “une reconquête populaire du mouvement cooperative” (p. 557). The emergence of the solidarity cooperative model and its proliferation within Quebec’s social economy represent just one way the cooperative movement has changed in the last several decades. This thesis aims, in part, to examine the extent to which the solidarity cooperative can contribute to a worker-centered *reconquête populaire* of the cooperative movement.

3.0 Methodology

As explored in-depth in this thesis' literature review, Multi-stakeholder co-operatives within Canada are uniquely concentrated in Quebec. Like many members of The Hive, I moved to Quebec for school and was unfamiliar with this model before my involvement with the co-op. This outsider's perspective on the solidarity co-operative model presented initial challenges for navigating this structure as a worker, but opened up possibilities for inquiry as a researcher. Rather than taking the unique elements of the solidarity co-operative model for granted, they stood out in contrast with my place-specific idea of how a co-operative workplace ought to function. This incongruity helped shape what was once simply a work-related curiosity into two research questions that form the basis of this thesis:

1. What barriers to democratic participation and workplace autonomy can the structures of solidarity co-operatives present to worker members
2. How can these barriers, if present, be navigated and mitigated?

To address these questions in the context of the Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative, I employ a case study research design. The following sections elaborate on the nature of this design and the specific methods utilised as part of the research process.

3.1 Case Study

A case study research design has proven fruitful for other, similar projects that explore labour in Quebec from a geographic perspective in uncovering nuanced worker experiences that can be analyzed within a broader political economic context (Donald, 2017). In an overview of applications of case study research, Robert Yin (2009, p. 257) notes that a “compelling theoretical framework” for case study research “could call attention to organizational, community, group, or other types of social processes or outcomes.” For these “process” case studies, Yin highlights the importance of carefully reviewing existing literature to find a “refined conceptual niche” that will allow such a case study to contribute to this literature. The case study employed by this thesis—that of The Hive Café Solidarity Co-operative—aims to apply existing critiques of co-operative governance to Quebec’s solidarity co-operative model in particular. Existing literature—especially English-language literature—on the solidarity co-operative model tends to be general in nature, offering an overview of the model rather than critically examining its contradictions. The case study used in this thesis will show how these contradictions can play out in real world, day-to-day operations of a solidarity co-op with thousands of members over the span of nearly a decade.

Yin’s guidelines for case study research have been criticized for “[surrendering] too much to the positivist mainstream” and downplaying the traditional strengths of the method, such as “depth and richness of data... typically obtained through participant observation” and a preference for “the in-depth single case study over the multiple case design”, in the pursuit of amassing large amounts of data from which generalizations

can be drawn (Piekkari & Welch, 2018, p. 8-9). While the research design of this thesis, like many case study-based research projects, draws from Yin, it also deviates from the “qualitative positivist” case study model in that it aims to achieve depth and contextual insight through extensive, in-depth knowledge of the case setting rather than linking together superficial similarities from multiple cases. This approach is advocated by researchers such as Dyer & Wilkins (1991) in their early critique of the positivist approach to case study research.

The case study explored by this thesis is approached using multiple methods: participant observation, interview and textual analysis . These methods will collect data from a variety of sources, which will be subsequently parsed for converging themes via the triangulation method outlined by Creswell & Miller (2000). Each method is discussed in turn below.

3.2 Participant Observation

Between the years of 2017 and 2021, I worked and volunteered at The Hive in a variety of capacities: as a cook, barista, worker member representative to the board of directors, vice president of the board of directors, chair of the Human Resources committee, Human Resources liaison, member of Food Committee, and member of several ad-hoc committees. These were the avenues through which I engaged with my case study as a participant observer. This process included attending dozens of board of directors meetings, committee meetings, worker member meetings, training sessions,

and general assemblies in addition to working hundreds of hours in shifts alongside other worker members. This participant observation process has afforded me an opportunity to study the solidarity co-operative model in a practical, hands-on way. I have experienced the challenges and benefits of this model firsthand, struggling to balance the needs of many different parties while also feeling empowered by exercising democratic control over my own workplace. As such, I have a personal stake in this research project: a better understanding of the solidarity co-operative model will allow me to be a more effective co-op member, helping to improve the working environment for myself and my co-workers as well as ensuring the longevity and effectiveness of an organization that challenges corporate food monopolies on Concordia University's campus and provides sustainable, low-cost (or free) food for students. This participant observation process has allowed me to build relationships and a sense of trust with those who I have interacted with as a researcher and has given me a degree of institutional knowledge that has helped refine my research process to an extent that would be impossible if I were an "outsider" to the organization.

This aspect of my research is guided by many of the principles laid out in Kemmis & McTaggart's (2005) frequently cited outline of Participatory Action Research. These include ensuring that my work has emancipatory aims, is practical and collaborative, is critical, and aims to transform practice. In simple terms, I aim to use the experiences and knowledge of my peers (i.e. those working in a variety of capacities within the organization) collected through the research process to help better understand the dynamics of the governance structure of solidarity cooperatives. From there, I hope to present these findings in a way that can be useful for workers and

others involved in cooperative projects in pursuit of their organizations' social goals. In many instances, the issues addressed in this thesis are also issues that I worked to address with my peers at The Hive, including many who participated in this project, on a day-to-day basis both concurrent and prior to the formal research process. This initiated a cyclical process whereby my research both informed and was informed by my work at The Hive alongside my coworkers, both during the formal research process and, perhaps even moreso, in moments of everyday, "off the record" collaboration. In this sense, this research project takes into account that "social and educational practices are located in, and are the product of, particular material, social, and historical circumstances that produced them and by which they are reproduced in everyday social interaction" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 279), a foundational principle of participatory action research.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic ceased most of The Hive's operations for a significant portion of this research project, thus limiting the extent to which collaborative work could be carried out, the insights produced by this thesis will ideally inform a broader, ongoing process of collaboration between The Hive's members and the community it serves that extends beyond the limits of this research project.

A similar years-long, participant observation research process conducted at a university-based co-operative in Massachusetts demonstrates that this method can be successful in uncovering the benefits of "workers having a say in their daily work lives" (Cornwell, 2011, p. 725) through institutional immersion and interviews with co-op members. Participant observation is also a longstanding tool used by researchers to examine the culture of democracy within co-operatives, from co-operative schools in

England (Davidge, Facer, & Schostak, 2015) to retail food co-operatives in Minnesota (Brown, 1985) to women-led worker co-ops in Hong Kong (Ng & Ng, 2009).

3.3 Interviews

My research process also involved conducting ten targeted interviews with former and current members of The Hive Café Solidarity Co-operative, including coordinators, board members, user members, worker members, and supporting members, with an emphasis on those in significant leadership roles and those involved in the development of the co-operative. As the focus of this research project is the position of worker members within solidarity co-operatives, over half of those interviewed were at one point worker members of The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative. Additionally, several interviewees have held leadership positions at other co-ops and social economic enterprises and some have even conducted their own research projects within this field. Although I had an existing working relationship with many interviewees, some had left the co-operative before I became a member and were therefore strangers to me. In these cases, interviewees were selected through a process of “snowball” sampling, through which they were recruited to the project by recommendation of earlier participants. These interviews were semi-structured, lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes each, and were conducted between February 2020 and May 2021. At first, interviews were conducted in person, however the COVID-19 pandemic forced most interviews to be conducted via videoconferencing software or

telephone. Although this presented some challenges—technological, logistical, or otherwise—it also allowed me to conduct interviews that would not be possible in person without significant travel costs. During this process, I interviewed former and current members of The Hive Café Solidarity Co-operative across Canada, from British Columbia to Newfoundland.

These interviews were conducted with the goal of prompting discussion on a number of topics relating to the experiences of interviewees as members of The Hive Café Solidarity Co-operative, including barriers to workplace democracy at The Hive, the pros and cons of the solidarity co-operative model, and tensions between constituent groups of the organization (see Appendix 1 for Interview Guide). These interviews were not only parsed for recurring (or contrasting) themes, but also helped guide the research process more generally, with interviewees often provoking further inquiry and pointing me in the direction of resources that proved invaluable to this thesis.

Schoenberger (1991) highlights the strengths of the open-ended interview as a method within the field of economic geography and in particular in understanding the labour relations of businesses in a way that is more sensitive to institutional complexity than quantitative methods such as large-scale, standardized surveys. According to Schoenberger (1991), the interview “permits direct investigation of strategic decision-making” (p. 182) within organizations, a key subject of this thesis. Similar studies of food-related co-operatives in Canada have employed targeted, semi-structured interviews with those in leadership roles in order to achieve a “dynamic,

multilevel perspective on governance” (Berge, Caldwell, & Mount, 2016, p. 460) within an organization; a goal shared by this thesis.

3.4 Textual Analysis

In addition to interviews and participant observation, the case study employed in this thesis also involved the analysis of a variety of texts relating to The Hive Café Solidarity Co-operative. These texts include the minutes of meetings, internal policy and by-laws, advertising material, and other documents contained within The Hive’s large organizational archive, in addition to texts external to The Hive, such as Concordia’s student-run newspaper, *The Link*, and other media associated with Concordia groups. Similar to the content of interviews conducted for this thesis, these texts were analyzed for recurring themes and rhetorical patterns, especially those that relate to the governance structure of solidarity co-operatives and the democratic culture of The Hive in particular. This analysis was conducted with the understanding that texts can contain multiple, sometimes contradictory layers of meaning and are subject to different interpretations, following the example of geographer Dean Forbes (2000). The themes uncovered from these texts were compared to the themes of interview responses and those found in existing literature on both the solidarity co-operative model in Quebec and the multi-stakeholder co-operative sector more broadly. Locating the convergences of themes from these sources was critical in understanding the underlying motivations

of relevant actors and connecting insights from my case study to conclusions drawn by other researchers studying the social economy.

4.0 The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative

4.1 History



A group of The Hive's members displaying their membership cards outside the Sir George Williams campus café, 2018. Source: [The Hive Café Facebook page](#).

The case study that forms the core of this thesis is of The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative, an entity that is comprised of two primarily student-run cafés as well as a free lunch program that operates at Concordia University's Loyola campus, located in Montreal's Notre-Dame-de-Grâce neighbourhood. Although "The Hive" has been the name of a number of spaces and initiatives at Concordia University since the 1970s, the current iteration of The Hive, which is run as a solidarity cooperative, began in 2013 following a series of successful referenda. In March 2013, students voted to mandate the Concordia Student Union (CSU) to support "affordable, sustainable, and student-run

food service initiatives on campus” (Concordia Student Union, n.d.). During the 2013 Fall by-elections, students voted in favour of the creation of the Concordia Food Coalition (CFC), a fee-levy group which would help achieve these goals. During the same by-elections, students also voted in favour of the creation of a student-run cooperative café to be located in the Hall Building, a central hub of Concordia’s downtown Sir George Williams (SGW) campus (Concordia Student Union, n.d.). This new student-run café would replace Java U, a for-profit enterprise that the CSU had signed a lease with in 1998—a move that was criticized for being “a sell-out to big business” and resulting in a “loss of student authority” (Harris, 2013).

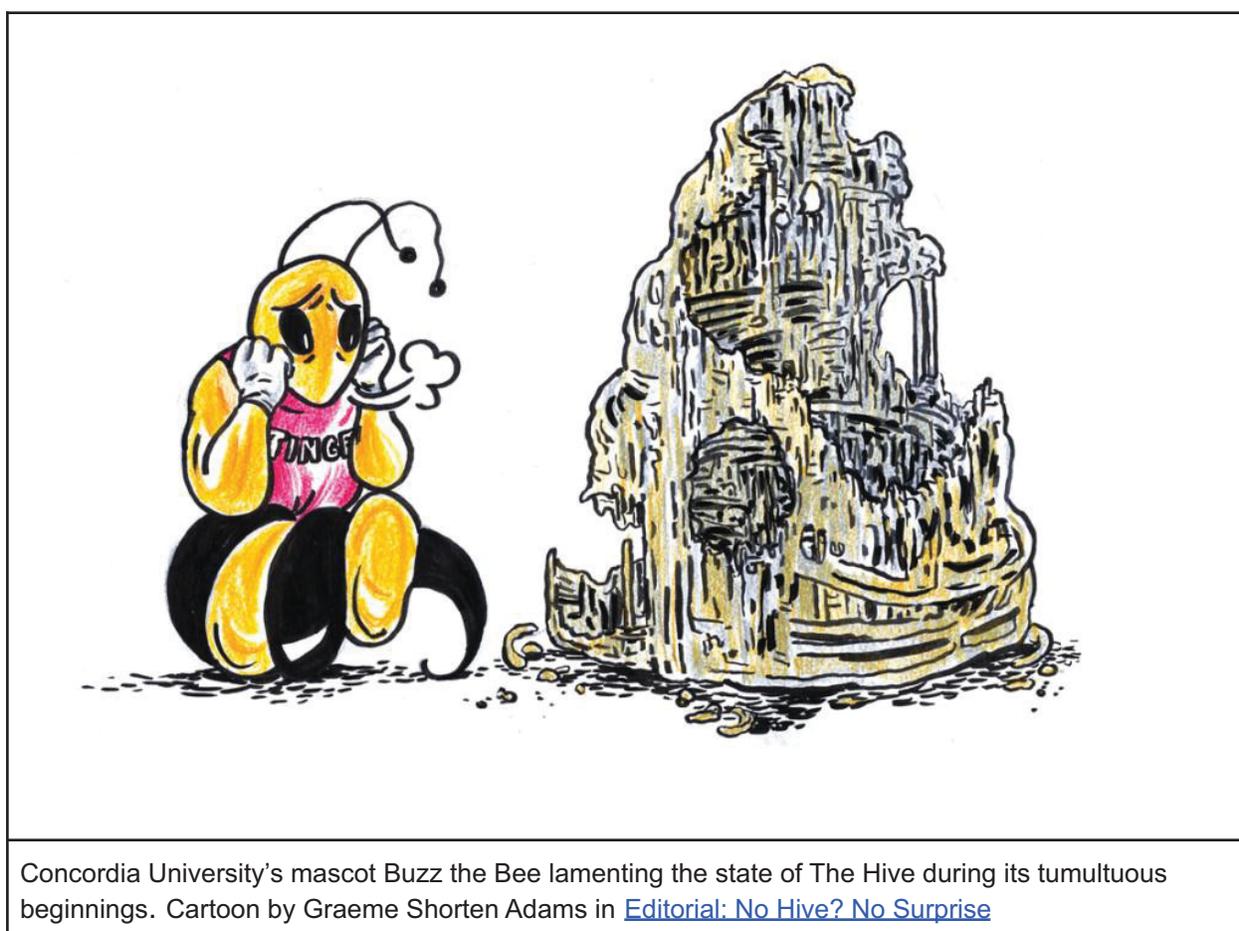


The Hive Free Lunch Program serving at Concordia’s Loyola campus. Source: [Concordia Food Groups](#)

This push for more autonomy over campus food systems stems in large part from the 2012 Quebec Student Movement, during which hundreds of thousands of students across the province participated in strikes and demonstrations in response to a proposed tuition hike under the Liberal government of Jean Charest. The success of the student movement—the tuition increase was eventually halted—left many students hungry for further political change and control within their educational institutions. Indeed, one of The Hive’s co-founders, Benjamin Prunty, who was a CSU councillor and strike organizer during the 2012 student movement, speaks of how The Hive “came into existence in a very political way” (Concordia Food Groups, 2017). The Hive serves not only as an alternative to for-profit enterprises such as Java U, but also to challenge the campus food service monopolies held by transnational corporations such as Chartwells and Aramark, whose practices have been criticized as ecologically unsustainable and disconnected from the dietary and economic needs of students (Kecik, 2017). Referring to these transnational food providers, Prunty believes “they don’t have any place in public institutions, specifically in universities” (Concordia Food Groups, 2017).

A series of “logistical, financial and ideological conflicts” ranging from electrical issues to disagreements between student union executives left The Hive project in limbo for some time (Wolfe, 2013). A 2014 article in *The Link*, Concordia’s student newspaper, jokingly acknowledges these difficulties, noting that “The Hive Café project has been in the works for so long that it has become the stuff of myth” (Didierjean, 2014). In 2014, despite these troubles, The Hive was finally able to open not only its referendum-mandated café in the Hall Building but also a second location at the Loyola campus in a space that had been operated as a student-run pub and event space on

and off for several decades. The Loyola Luncheon, a service operated out of this space providing free vegetarian meals to students, would be renamed The Hive Free Lunch Program. Both the CSU and the Concordia Food Coalition provided significant monetary and logistical resources in the process of opening both cafés and as such have permanent seats on The Hive's board of directors, which continues to oversee the operations of the two cafés and the free lunch program to this day. Significant grants were also provided by social economic institutions in Quebec, including the Corporation de développement économique communautaire (CDEC).



The Hive operates in accordance with the following Vision, Mission, and Values, which are embedded within the organizations by-laws (Appendix 2):

Vision

The Hive Cafe Solidarity Co-op envisions accessible food systems that are socially, economically, as well as environmentally regenerative that are operated locally and democratically.

Mission

The mission of the Hive Cafe Co-op is to be a model food system at Concordia University that provides food through sustainable practices and empowers the student community.

Values

At the Hive Cafe we value:

- HEALTHY FOOD that is organic, locally grown, and varied
- JUST FOOD that is accessible, affordable and ethically sourced
- SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES that are socially, economically, and environmentally sound.
- FAIR REPRESENTATION of the diversity of our members, stakeholders and community.
- Strong ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY to our members, stakeholders and community.
- EMPOWERING STUDENTS as vital actors in the decision-making process
- Upholding FAIR LABOUR RELATIONS, WORKER & VOLUNTEER RIGHTS within the Hive Cafe.
- Cultivating a GROWTH MINDSET at the Hive Cafe through continuous learning opportunities.
- Nurturing SAFER COMMUNITY SPACES that are welcoming and non-judgemental and promote inclusion.

4.2 Structure & Operations

In accordance with Quebec's Cooperatives Act, The Hive is governed by a board of directors composed of worker members, user members, and supporting members.

The Hive's by-laws outline the composition of the 14-member board of directors (Table 2).

Table 2: Composition of The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative’s Board of Directors

Category of Member	Worker	User	Supporting
Number of positions	4	7	3
Breakdown of seats	2 positions for workers at the downtown café; 2 positions for workers at the Loyola café, kitchen, or free lunch program	3 positions for students; 3 positions for professors; 1 position for non-students	1 position for CSU representative; 1 position for CFC representative 1 position for any person or organization with an economic, cultural or social interest in the mandate of the co-op.
Further Qualifications	Coordinators may not sit on the board of directors; Worker member board representatives must be students	N/A	Support members cannot exceed one third of the total number of directors (in the event of vacancies)
Cost of Membership	1 share @ \$10 =\$10	1 share @ \$10 =\$10	10 shares @ \$10 =\$100

Adapted from The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative By-Laws (2019) (See Appendix 2)

Vacant board seats are filled at general assemblies, which are held annually. Candidates are nominated and voted on by members of the same category (worker members vote for worker representatives, user members vote for user representatives, etc.), who elect representatives to two-year terms. The board of directors meets on a monthly basis and votes to approve or reject motions and proposals based on simple majority, providing a quorum of 50% plus one is met. Directors, acting on a volunteer basis, also form a number of committees, which make recommendations to the board based on their particular mandates. Core committees include Finance Committee,

Governance & Policy Committee, Human Resources Committee, Food Committee, and Marketing Committee (see Appendix 3 for a detailed breakdown of the responsibilities and composition of The Hive's committees). Ad Hoc committees are also formed as needed. In addition to general assemblies, the board of directors, and committees, coordinators are also an important component of The Hive's governance structure. Coordinators, who function in a similar manner to departmental managers, are in charge of day-to-day operations, earn a higher wage than other worker members, and are empowered to make financial decisions less than \$300 without approval from the board of directors. Coordinators attend board of directors meetings and provide input and information as non-voting members, but cannot be elected to the board as worker member representatives—a policy put in place to limit the concentration of power within the organization. The exact coordinator structure changes based on the needs of the organization at any given time, but has included kitchen coordinator, café coordinator, finance coordinator, external coordinator (events and catering), and delivery coordinator.



“Congratulations, you are now a café owner!” The Hive Café’s membership card. Source: [The Hive Café Facebook page](#).

Although wages have fluctuated throughout The Hive’s history—in response to both budgetary considerations and changes in provincial minimum wage—non-coordinator worker members typically earn minimum wage or slightly above minimum wage (currently \$14.25/hr in Quebec) and also receive tips, which are shared between baristas and cooks. Coordinators, who do not receive tips, earn more per hour and receive a \$1/hr annual raise. During the course of this research project, coordinators were earning approximately \$20/hr. Typically, coordinators work full-time hours whereas non-coordinators work part-time hours. Although wage increases were frequently discussed, The Hive has run several significant annual budget deficits in

recent years, resulting in financial difficulties that were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, wages have remained largely stagnant.

The Hive's approximately twenty employees work across The Hive's two cafés, its production kitchen, and its free lunch program. Most employees work at the downtown café, located at Concordia's Sir George Williams campus, while a much smaller number work at The Hive's other locations. Those who work at the downtown café—referred to internally as the “Mezz” location, due to its location on the mezzanine level of Concordia's Hall Building—divide their time between taking orders, preparing food, preparing coffee, and washing dishes as part of a team of 3-4 employees. The downtown café is in a large, centrally-located space and is often busy, especially at lunchtime, resulting in a fast-paced work environment. At the Loyola location, workers' duties are similar, although at a reduced scale. Workers in The Hive's production kitchen, located on the 7th floor of the Hall Building, produce large quantities of food in an industrial-grade kitchen, which is then sent to The Hive's two cafés on a weekly schedule. The Hive's free lunch coordinators facilitate the free lunch program at Concordia's Loyola campus, overseeing volunteers, procuring and preparing food, and cleaning up the space.

In the following chapter, my own experiences as a participant observer at The Hive, in addition to interviews with key figures, are used to discuss and analyze the nature of participation within governance in the organization as well as dynamics between groups of members, with particular emphasis on the implications for worker members.

5.0 Discussion & Analysis

In this chapter, the following sections will examine major topics that arose during discussions with members of The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative interviewed throughout the course of this project. These topics are grouped by theme and are contextualized within existing literature on solidarity cooperatives in Quebec as well as within the broader scope of this research project. Section 1 examines interviewees' positive impressions of the solidarity model via their experiences at The Hive and is broken down into three subsections: the general strengths of the model, strengths specifically pertaining to the model's flexibility and adaptability, and strengths that stem from the networks formed by the model's structure. Section 2 examines the nature of compromise between different types of solidarity cooperative member through the lens of The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative as well as its implications for this thesis' research questions. Explorations of compromise and conflict are grouped into two categories in section 2, each with its own discussion and analysis sections: dynamics between different types of solidarity cooperative member—worker, user, and supporting members—and dynamics between two “informal” groups within the cooperative—one representing those with institutional knowledge (or “experience”) of The Hive's governance structure and one representing those who lack it. This latter distinction is “informal” in that these two groups are not formally part of the structure of the solidarity cooperative as defined by the Quebec's Cooperatives Act, despite its influence on the composition of these groups and their relative power. but their composition may result from its structure. The relationship between these two dynamics, in particular how it

impacts worker members within The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative is then examined, followed by an overview of some strategies for mitigating challenges to workers that are presented by these dynamics, concluding the section.

5.1 Strengths of the Solidarity Model

5.1.1 General Strengths

Many interviewees spoke of perceived strengths of the solidarity co-operative model, often in similar terms. Several spoke of the benefits of having a governance structure composed of multiple classes of co-op member: worker, user, and supporting members. This model allows for “representative decision making” that “[ensures] multiple kinds of needs are met”, according to a former coordinator and president of the board. Another former coordinator, also a user member board representative, spoke of the benefits of “the highest decision making body [having] voices of both the people who are using the organization and also the workers because that takes in both aspects of a business: you have the consumer, you have the worker... ultimately it makes it more democratic because you have to meet [the needs of] both groups of member” and added that it is “good for accountability to have different perspectives”. Another former user member board representative who helped in the process of founding The Hive similarly highlights how “the solidarity co-operative model offers a very inclusive form of governance that has a potential to draw on the strengths of particular actors” and

offered an example of how this strategy was put into place when structuring The Hive's board of directors: "when we added extra seats for professors, we wanted to draw on the strengths of professors that had experience with food systems or marketing or different aspects of running a business".

These types of sentiments generally align with the benefits of the solidarity co-operative model that are put forward in literature that contextualizes this model within the broader social economy. Namely that the solidarity model is "vigorous and inclusive" (Lund, 2012, p. 38) and "ambidextrous" (Pérez et al., 2016), while "offer[ing] potential for broadening democratic voice" (Gray, 2014, p. 27) beyond what is possible in a single-party co-operative. In addition to identifying these general strengths of the model, interviewees also pointed to a number of more specific ways the model has benefitted The Hive, including its ability to be responsive to the organization's unique needs and its ability to link The Hive into a supportive social economic network.

5.1.2 Flexibility and Adaptability

In the case of The Hive, the solidarity model is uniquely adaptable to the organization's needs in several ways. First, staff turnover is high, as most positions are filled by students whose availability is subject to change each semester. As such, the two-year term required for board members, as outlined in The Hive's by-laws, may be an unrealistic commitment for many of The Hive's staff. However, the founding members of The Hive felt it was important for workers to have a voice in the organization's

governance despite these challenges. As indicated by several interviewees involved in the process of establishing The Hive, this was one reason for choosing the solidarity co-operative model, which would allow for worker representation while also ensuring a degree of stability within the board of directors.

For members of a worker co-op, “it tends to be people for who that’s their career... they’re there for the long haul” whereas “in a university environment, that investment is being balanced with your studies and whatever other things people are putting their energy toward”, explained one interviewee, who in addition to helping establish The Hive has also studied co-operatives as a graduate student. Indeed, there has been a high turnover rate of both worker members and their board representatives at The Hive, for reasons ranging from graduation to seeking jobs that provide more stability and higher wages than a cook or barista position.

Just as there were reasons a worker co-operative model would be less than ideal for The Hive, its founding members considered a consumer or user co-operative model to be similarly inadequate. Another interviewee, a user member and the first president of The Hive’s board of directors, explained this thought process during the founding of The Hive: “if we go with the user co-op model, the workers are going to have no voice”. This interviewee also spoke of the unique political climate following the 2012 Quebec student strikes that made a co-operative structure with a broad membership base, such as a solidarity co-operative, desirable for those structuring The Hive in its early days:

“that was always an ambition... to have this be a space where you’re able to tap into traditionally non-political students and politicize them through the process of

being a member of a co-operative... the strike built up the organizing capacity and skills of students and when the strike was over, you had all these highly energetic, politicized students that were like ‘we could change the world, what’s next?’”

Another reason the solidarity model uniquely fits the circumstances of The Hive is related to the organization’s funding structure. The Concordia Student Union (CSU) played a significant role in the founding of The Hive and continues to support the organization by providing a significant annual grant in addition to fully funding The Hive’s free lunch program. In order to justify these continued expenditures to its membership—i.e., Concordia’s student body—the CSU sought a role in governance and a means of ongoing oversight during the initial structuring of The Hive. To these ends, the CSU was given a permanent supporting member position on The Hive’s board of directors.¹ Additionally, The Hive’s by-laws were structured to ensure the organization—funded by the student union—remains student-run and student-oriented. Three of The Hive’s seven user member representatives must be students at Concordia University, as do all four of its worker member representatives.² These seven positions designated for students, in addition to the permanent supporting member positions for the CSU and the Concordia Food Coalition ensure a majority of The Hive’s 14-member board of directors is composed of students. This structural mandate is reflected in The Hive’s values, which are embedded in its by-laws, and state: “At The Hive Café we value... empowering students as vital actors in the decision-making process.”

¹ See section 5.5 of The Hive’s by-laws.

² See sections 5.3 and 5.4 of The Hive’s by-laws.

Accordingly, “It was the only model that really fit what we could do with the stakeholders that were involved”, said one former user member board representative who also helped establish The Hive in 2013. They elaborated that “it would have been politically difficult to create a worker co-op”, as the Concordia Student Union (CSU) had contributed significant start-up capital from a fund set aside to benefit its members—Concordia’s student body—and “as a solidarity co-op, the user members have a say”.

The Hive stands as an example of one of the best—and perhaps most unsung—strengths of the solidarity co-operative model: flexibility. Enterprises that could not otherwise exist as co-operatives may find the solidarity model adaptable to their specific circumstances. For enterprises that do not have a large enough userbase to sustain a consumer co-op but still want users to have a say in governance, the solidarity model is an ideal fit. For enterprises with a small or transient workforce, the solidarity model allows for a degree of worker ownership without committing to a potentially unsustainable worker co-operative model. For enterprises or organizations that aspire to co-operative ownership but have a small or inexperienced pool of potential co-op members, the solidarity model can fill in these gaps with supporting members. This level of flexibility allows for growth in the co-operative sector—and by extension the social economy—that is both rapid and broad. In Quebec, the proliferation of solidarity co-operatives during the first decade of the model’s implementation already represented “some kind of renaissance of the co-operative movement” (Girard & Langlois, 2009, p. 230). Solidarity co-ops are most prevalent in the fields of healthcare and social services, but

have also seen growth in fields as diverse as agriculture, tourism, and the arts (Lund, 2011). As of 2013, there are more solidarity co-ops in Quebec than producer and worker co-ops combined³ (Ministère des Finances et de l'Économie du Québec, 2013). It is clear that the solidarity model—and its ability to conform to the unique needs of a wide variety of enterprises—contributes significantly to Quebec's status as “one of the most productive and vibrant cooperative development sectors in the world” (Lund, 2011, p. 1).

5.1.3 Supporting Members and Networks

The presence of supporting members within the solidarity co-operative model not only allowed The Hive to incorporate as a co-op while also satisfying the needs of its funders, but also created formal ties between The Hive and an existing network of organizations with complementary social and economic goals, such as The Concordia Student Union, The Concordia Food Coalition, The Concordia City Farm School, The Concordia Greenhouse, The Concordia Dish Project, and Ferme des Arpents Roses—of all which have had representation as supporting members on The Hive's board of directors. This network not only makes connections between stakeholders, for example from supplier to distributor (in the case of Ferme des Arpents Roses, which provided The Hive with organic produce), but also allows for the flow of resources—administrative, legal, financial, or otherwise—between organizations. For example, the Concordia Student Union has been a major conduit for The Hive's funding

³ The number of solidarity co-ops in Quebec also greatly exceeds the number of consumer co-operatives if housing co-ops are excluded from this category.

throughout its history, including through an annual grant. Both The Hive's broad goals, such as challenging corporate food monopolies on Concordia's campus, and its day-to-day operations—running two busy restaurants selling affordable food with quality ingredients—are made considerably more manageable through the support of this network, which is built into The Hive's structure.

The formation of networks within the social economy, including among co-operatives, is a key strategy in ensuring the viability of socially-oriented enterprises. This strategy has been employed by co-ops ranging from small co-operative farms serving a primarily local population (Vandeburg et al., 2004) to national, multi-sector co-operatives that rank among the largest in the world (Iuviene et al., 2010). This network strategy has been used as a means of increasing the scale of co-operatives, despite having less access to capital than market-oriented competitors (Rodrigues & Schneider, 2021). Networks among co-operatives are also widespread throughout Quebec's thriving social economy. These include the La Fédération québécoise des coopératives de santé (FQCS), which links together 44 health co-operatives across 14 of Quebec's 17 administrative regions, and Le Conseil québécois des entreprises adaptées (CQEA), which provides employment to people living within disabilities through a network of 36 co-operatives and non-profits. The Chantier de l'économie sociale, a group that arose from the 1996 Summit on the Economy and Employment, is a key facilitator of these networks within Quebec, as it seeks to “[b]ring together the main stakeholders of the social economy movement in Québec in order to create favourable conditions” and “[f]acilitate links, sharing of best practices, and discussions among the movement's various components.” Notably, the Chantier de l'économie

sociale facilitates the Réseau d'investissement social du Québec (RISQ), Quebec's first non-profit venture capital fund dedicated exclusively to the social economy, which has provided millions of dollars in loans to co-operatives across the province (Neamtan, 2005).

The solidarity co-operative model, true to its name, continues the trend of network formation within Quebec's social economy. Solidarity co-ops, through their structure, are encouraged to form links not just between groups of direct stakeholders—consumers and workers, for example—but also between organizations within the social economy via the role of supporting member, a category that broadly encompasses any “person or partnership that has an economic, social or cultural interest in the pursuit of the objects of the cooperative,” according to section 226.1 of Quebec's Cooperatives Act. The Hive has benefited significantly from partnerships formed with groups represented by supporting members—partnerships which have afforded The Hive stability in its governance, access to funding and other resources, and allowed the organization to tap into thriving social economic networks within Concordia University and Quebec more generally. Interviewees identified not just reasons why The Hive *had* to be a solidarity co-operative—shoring up funding, ensuring board positions were filled—but also reasons The Hive *should* be a solidarity co-operative, namely the benefits of bringing together a diverse group of students, professors, and workers within the social economy to collectively build a political project. On both fronts, the solidarity model has helped The Hive achieve these goals.

5.2.0 Democracy and Decision Making: Compromise or Conflict?

Democracy at The Hive and barriers to its fulfilment were topics that proved highly provocative for participants. Interviewees expressed a variety of opinions regarding the extent to which the solidarity co-operative model fosters democracy within The Hive. Despite these diverging opinions, all interviewees agreed that, at least to some extent, the solidarity co-operative model made an organization more democratic than a standard profit-oriented model. One interviewee, a former worker member board representative, sums up this attitude succinctly: “[The Hive] is more democratic than a Tim Hortons or a random hipster café in the Mile End [a gentrifying Montreal neighbourhood].”

However, even those with the most faith in the solidarity co-operative model expressed some degree of cynicism regarding the level of democracy within The Hive. For example, one interviewee stated their belief that “solidarity co-ops are less democratic [than single party co-ops] but overall more positive because they are taking in more points of view.” Another interviewee, a founding member of The Hive, explains that the solidarity model creates the “illusion of a true democracy... that doesn’t always get fulfilled.” A former worker member board representative believes that, during their tenure, “the average user in The Hive... didn’t have the knowledge” to navigate the governance structure of the organization, suggesting that these issues relating to democratic access are widespread.

Despite diverging opinions on outcomes, interviewees were united on one front: conflict between groups of members pervades governance within The Hive throughout

different eras and generations of leadership. One long-term board member sums up this attitude succinctly, describing a tendency to see different parties as having “mutually exclusive interests” that result in “people feel[ing] like their needs as x kind of member are incompatible with another kind [of member].”

Although there are a variety of benefits of the solidarity co-operative model, as outlined in the previous section, its most touted quality is often its ability to coax compromise from its constituent parties. In fact, a section of Margaret Lund’s *Solidarity as a Business Model*, a frequently cited manual on multi-stakeholder co-operatives that focusses heavily on Quebec, is titled “A Favorable Élan of Compromises”. This section of the manual encourages those taking a multi-stakeholder approach to “think about pursuing compromise not as a strategy imbued with cynicism or defeat but rather one characterized by enthusiasm, self-confidence and style” (2012, p. 49). Although such an outlook is undoubtedly practical for the balancing act that is multi-stakeholder governance, it may serve to obscure the dynamics of this type of co-operative structure. Although compromise is a necessary—and ultimately desirable—component of multi-stakeholder governance, the questions of who is compromising the most, what is “given up” in the process of compromise, and what dynamics determine these outcomes should not be overlooked by viewing compromise as an unqualified positive.

Issues raised by interviewees relating to democracy, compromise, and conflict at The Hive generally fell into two broad but related categories. The first of these categories comprises dynamics between formal categories of solidarity co-operative member: user, worker, and supporting members. The second category deals with dynamics between informal categories of co-op members, namely those members with

the experience needed to navigate The Hive's structure with ease and those who lack this experience, resulting in a "knowledge gap" that creates differential levels of access to The Hive's democratic structures. These two dynamics, their relationship to each other, and their implications for workers within solidarity co-operatives will be explored in the subsequent sections.

5.2.1 Inter-Member Dynamics: Discussion

As mentioned previously, the multi-stakeholder governance structure of solidarity co-operatives is touted as "vigorous and inclusive" (Lund, 2012, p. 38) and "ambidextrous" (Pérez et al., 2016). These views were echoed by a number of interviewees, who stated variously that The Hive is "a co-op where anybody... can have a say" with a "very inclusive form of governance" and a structure based around "representative decision making" that is "designed to incorporate a variety of perspectives." The solidarity co-operative model "doesn't mean you'll get what you want, it means you'll get a little bit of what everybody wants," explains a former café coordinator.

While some interviewees expressed positive views of the compromise between stakeholders that is inherent to the solidarity co-operative model, all described some form of conflict between membership classes that they had either witnessed or been a part of at The Hive. On this topic, many interviewees focused on conflict between user members and worker members, with some describing their respective agendas as

particularly in tension. A former general coordinator and founding member of The Hive spoke generally of the dynamic of a board of directors composed of both employees and customers: “it makes it complicated, it makes it messy, it makes it tricky... often the consumers just want cheaper things [and] more marketing” while “workers want worker’s rights.” Another long-term board member goes as far as describing this dynamic as a “fundamental tension between workers on the board and everyone else.”

Although several interviewees perceived barriers to worker members in particular presented by The Hive’s multi-stakeholder governance structure, this was not unanimous, with other interviewees offering a variety of contrasting perspectives. One interviewee stated that user and supporting members “do what’s best for the organization” whereas worker members are concerned with “what’s best for the workers.” Another interviewee offers a window into this dynamic by highlighting a key difference in the constituencies of user and worker members:

“I was a user member, but I was just representing myself and what I thought progressive people on campus [thought]. I wasn’t beholden to anybody’s desire to have me push forward motions; whereas as a worker member, you have workers who have real, tangible things that they see and want to have affected at the board meetings, so they’re way more accountable to the workers”

Several interviewees expressed a belief that worker members tend to dominate The Hive’s board. One describes a tendency for worker members to “advocate more strongly than the other groups [of member]” and another adds, “users tend to not bring

up their concerns very often... decisions lean toward worker needs over user requests.”

The perceived disproportionate influence of worker members was attributed to several factors. Although there are seven user member representatives on The Hive’s board of directors and only four worker member representatives, there are “many more [BoD seats] reserved for worker members when you look at it proportionately,” explains a former board president. This is true—The Hive typically has several thousand user members and less than 30 worker members. Additionally, “workers had so much more information than the user, except for a select few,” explains one interviewee. “The workers are in that space more and carry a certain amount of legitimacy by being like ‘we run this thing’,” adds another. Whereas sales figures, product costing, and other information are largely just numbers in a spreadsheet to many user and supporting member directors, worker members experience these more tangibly, through interactions with customers, through busy workdays, through their daily routine. However, as will be expanded on in the subsequent section, this knowledge is often practical rather than technical: worker members generally have a stronger grasp on day-to-day café operations and workplace skills but often lack the financial, procedural, and legal knowledge that is needed to navigate The Hive’s governance structure within leadership roles when compared to user and supporting member directors.

Although interviewees acknowledged tensions between types of members, not all believed this was necessarily undesirable. “A certain degree of tension is actually important because it pushes growth and it pushes change,” explains a former general coordinator. Likewise, another interviewee—who has held leadership roles at several co-ops—believes “[the solidarity co-operative model] brings the tension of different

voices directly into the decision-making process [and] that tension breeds innovation.” Referring to the push-and-pull between the agendas of worker and user members, an interviewee who was involved in the structuring of The Hive in its early days explains that with the solidarity co-operative model, “you’re creating space for deliberation internally... [for] discussions that are being had either way.” This position is that, whether it is a co-op or not, the public will choose to patronize (or not to patronize) The Hive based on factors including prices and product quality, which in turn will put downward pressure on wages. By offering consumers representation as user members, this dynamic can be negotiated directly between parties, allowing for a better chance at reaching an outcome that is mutually beneficial—or so this logic goes.

Some interviewees viewed the dynamic between worker members and user members as ultimately unfair or disadvantageous to worker members. Reasons for this belief were twofold: first, the agenda of user members, in general, can be contrary to the interests of worker members, and second, many user members are unfamiliar with the day-to-day operations of the co-operative and as a result are unqualified to be involved in decision making. “The motivating factors of a user are lowering price, better product. It’s always a drive to the bottom in terms of prices,” explains a former supporting member board representative. One interviewee, who has the unique perspective of having been both a user member and a worker member representative offers a window into this tension: “user members have no idea what’s on the go... they are the least in the loop... they wouldn’t know how to approach the board even if they wanted to. Why should they have the same access [as worker members]?” This interviewee also expressed frustration with this dynamic as it related to the election of board

representatives: “When I was a user member, I appreciated that I had a say, but when I was I worker I was like ‘why do these people [user members] get to decide if I should represent the workers?’” At the time, all co-op members present at an AGM (annual general meeting) were eligible to vote in the election of all representatives—regardless of if they were a user, worker, or supporting member. While this practice has since changed, and now members of The Hive may only elect their direct representatives (e.g., worker members can only vote for worker member representatives, user members can only vote for user member representatives), the interviewee’s sentiment speaks to the general tensions that inform the relationship between worker and user members at The Hive.

For some workers, the presence of competing agendas within The Hive’s governance structure is viewed more as a challenge for the realization of goals rather than an opportunity for mutually-beneficial compromise. “Worker members might make a request that would be brought to the board and debated and maybe modified and then [the board of directors] would never really answer the question or effectively solve the problem or the issue that was brought up,” explains a long-time user member representative who has observed this dynamic at play, adding that this was “a source of frustration for some [worker members].”

On several occasions, worker members have presented ideas to the board of directors and to the general assembly but have failed to see them realized due to procedural issues—by not submitting a formal proposal, by not adding a point to the agenda in advance, or by not consulting with the relevant committees, for example. Although it is important that these policies—adopted through The Hive’s democratic

processes—are consistently followed, worker members may not be well versed in this procedure, may not be familiar with members of certain committees, or may not be aware of the existence of these committees in the first place. One notable example of a worker-led initiative that was met with procedural barriers occurred at the 2018 Annual General Meeting, when a group of worker members sought to have a workers' collective, which had been meeting informally to address a variety of workplace concerns, formally recognized and integrated within The Hive's governance structure. When this motion was put forward, it was met with skepticism and a degree of hostility from some members of the co-op. This resulted in a protracted debate that at times became heated. One user member raised the following criticism of the collective:

“Solidarity cooperatives are governed by a multi-stakeholder representation. Workers are represented in this structure and must abide [by] the same structure and policies. This proposal is like creating a workers union and is going against the spirit of a multi-stakeholder representation and will inappropriately impact the other stakeholders. In the spirit of the solidarity co-op, [user member] is against this motion and . . . suspects that it is illegal.” (The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative, 2017, p. 11)

Another user member, one of the founding members of the co-operative, took issue with using the AGM as a forum to bring the idea of a workers' collective forward:

“[User member] doesn’t believe that this is the most inclusive and comprehensive setting to have a proper discussion [on the workers’ collective]”

Despite this criticism, some members spoke about the challenges worker members face within this type of governance structure, an example of which can be found in this excerpt from the AGM minutes:

“[user member] speaks to their experience in solidarity cooperatives. Acknowledges that the struggle for worker issues to be brought to the board is real. It isn’t unique to the Hive. Their experience [is] with the Media Co-op, and it has struggled with this issue” (The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative, 2017, p. 13)

Although the motion to recognize the workers’ collective ultimately passed by a small margin, a related motion to “prioritize the well-being of the cafe and its workers over expansion” failed. Additionally, the pushback against the workers’ collective and the notion that its very existence could be illegal or contrary to the spirit of the solidarity co-operative model loomed intimidatingly over its activities in subsequent years.

Another, more recent example of the procedural barriers workers face in effecting change at The Hive involved a group of worker members who, following The Hive’s reopening in 2021 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, sought to develop a proposal for a wage increase. However, this was undertaken without consultation with The Hive’s finance committee and without consideration of The Hive’s 2021 budget and 2020

Financial Report. Because of the incongruity between this proposal and The Hive's budget, it "died on the vine" before it could be voted on by the board of directors, leaving those involved in its drafting frustrated, having not been aware of these procedural obligations. While worker initiatives must comport with The Hive's budget and procedures, this example illustrates that worker members are, in many cases, unfamiliar with these aspects of the organization, despite having received training. While this raises questions relating to the efficacy of worker member training, it also highlights the challenges worker members face in navigating The Hive's governance structure that may be taken for granted by its directors.

5.2.2 Inter-Member Dynamics: Analysis

The case study of The Hive Café Solidarity Co-operative suggests that conflict, in addition to compromise, can be a fundamental component of the governance structure of the solidarity co-operative. Whether viewed negatively—as an impediment to worker autonomy—or positively—as a catalyst for innovation—interviewees spoke at length of the ways conflict, including conflict between types of co-operative member, has shaped their experiences at The Hive.

The underlying logic of the solidarity co-operative model posits that, since multiple parties both impact and are impacted by the operations of a co-operative, the presence of these parties within a co-op's governance structure will be more beneficial—for the co-op and for the parties themselves—than their exclusion. In an ideal scenario, this will result in compromise between parties that ensures the prosperity

of the co-operative: “a favorable élan of compromises” (Lund, 2011, p. 49), as it is put in an overview of the solidarity co-operative model. However, this structure can also pit competing agendas against each other, resulting in conflict. To use an example raised by a former general coordinator, “often the consumers just want cheaper things [while]... workers want worker’s rights.” While this is somewhat reductive—user members are often strong advocates of worker’s rights—it highlights the potential for conflict that is a direct result of structural aspects of the solidarity co-operative, such as the inclusion of both consumers and workers within its governance.

Illustrating this type of conflict, interviewees spoke of a feeling of “mutually exclusive interests” between parties that created impasses in decision-making processes and left some unsatisfied in their ability to effect change within the organization. This sentiment was especially pronounced among worker members, who expressed frustration with the influence that user and supporting members had over their workplace. As one former worker member board representative puts it, “it takes a little bit of power away from the workers when there are so many stakeholders, for better or for worse. When you’re a worker it feels like for the worse.” Although The Hive’s worker members have some degree of autonomy over their workplace, significant changes and expenditures over \$300 must be approved by the majority non-worker member board of directors. A recent example of the frustration worker members can experience when the board of directors makes decisions that directly impact the workplace occurred when the board voted to temporarily close The Hive’s Loyola campus location due to unsustainably low sales figures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While this decision technically followed procedure, the vote occurred without

consulting Loyola worker members and while the Loyola worker member representative was on a leave of absence, resulting in frustration among impacted worker members.

Conversely, some user members expressed a belief that worker members were overrepresented, both in terms of representation on the board of directors and overall influence, within The Hive. Some interviewees acknowledged this push-and-pull between the interests of worker and user members, but explained that ultimately it benefits The Hive in a business sense. For example, one interviewee explained, “if we were to [excessively] increase wages, we would go under. If we were to [excessively] decrease the cost of food, we would go under.”

For social economic enterprises, including co-operatives, “prime interest does not lie in profit-maximisation, but in building social capacity and responding to under-met needs” (Amin, Cameron, & Hudson, 2002, p.1). This is reflected in the international co-operative principles, which emphasize social goals—“democratic member control” and “concern for community”, for example—over economic goals (International Cooperative Alliance, 2018). So does the structure of the solidarity co-operative, which at its core encourages compromise between prices and wages in the interest of consumer (i.e., user) satisfaction, run contrary to the social aims of the co-operative? On one hand, some of the rhetoric surrounding the benefits of multi-stakeholder governance, both from interviewees and from literature on solidarity co-operatives, evokes concepts from market orthodoxy. For instance, the idea that consumers and workers debating and ultimately compromising on prices, wages, inputs, and all other aspects of the business will ultimately result in a favourable equilibrium between supply and demand evokes Adam Smith’s theory of the “invisible hand” of the market. In this

sense, the solidarity co-operative model attempts to internalizes market signals that are said to dictate the movement of the invisible hand into a process of compromise between parties—or as one interviewee puts it, the solidarity model “[creates] space for deliberation internally... [for] discussions that are being had either way.”

Of course, bringing market forces into a forum where parties deliberate with each other directly and where outcomes are bounded by socially oriented rules (a co-op’s by-laws and policies, the Rochdale Principles, etc.) is preferable, including from a worker perspective, to being cast adrift into the free market. The dynamics of the solidarity co-operative model are not untethered from the capitalist market entirely but rather represent a taming or softening of market forces—the extent to which this occurs depends on the structure and operations of each particular co-op.

This is not to say that the solidarity co-operative model *intentionally* incorporates aspects of the capitalist market economy, snuck in under the guise of inclusivity. Instead, this happens as a knock-on effect of the drive to include more and more stakeholders within the governance structures of co-operatives. The field of urban planning, in which “the stakeholder” has taken root and has generated much debate, offers a lens with which to view this discourse within the co-operative sector. In the practices of participatory and collaborative planning, the idea that “quality and thoroughness will be enhanced when all relevant stakeholders are part of the process” (Cilliers & Timmermans, 2014, p. 419) is foundational. However, critics of stakeholder-centered planning have raised doubts about the underlying principles of this approach: “[i]t is not clear how stakeholders, defined by self-acclamation with little to validate or authenticate their claim, are mediated via Collaborative Planning processes”

(Murtagh et al., 2008, p. 87). Instead, an approach of “understanding how power is asserted in multiple ways, by different interests and for different reasons” (Murtagh et al., 2008, p. 87, from Gunder, 2003, p. 280) is advanced. The pursuit of frictionless compromise between disparate groups of stakeholders “is at best an unrealisable fantasy” (Gunder, 2003, p. 239). Likewise, the “favorable élan of compromises” said to characterize the solidarity co-operative model is an optimistic oversimplification of the complex and often fraught dynamic between workers, consumers, producers, and other stakeholders that is at its core. The assumption of parity among members (“one member, one vote”) within multi-stakeholder cooperatives, invisibilizes power dynamics that should instead be acknowledged and mediated.

Other critics of stakeholder discourse within urban planning take aim at its tendency to “[collapse] differentiated subjects with complex relations into merely interested parties” (Ferrer, 2021). Quebec’s Cooperatives Act, in defining solidarity co-operatives, performs this very act of collapsing: co-op members may be “any... person or partnership that has an economic, social or cultural interest in the pursuit of the objects of the cooperative”. This critique of the position of the stakeholder within urban planning raises several questions relevant to the solidarity co-operative. Should organizations with primarily social goals involve all “interested parties” in governance? In the pursuit of these social aims, should some “interested parties” hold more influence than others? Although the solidarity co-operative is a relatively new model, Michaud & Audebrand (2018) have taken a first pass at exploring these questions as they pertain to supporting members in particular. As supporting members do not necessarily use the services of the co-operatives they are members of, their presence “represents an

important rupture with Québec's traditional cooperative model" (p. 1384), presenting a number of governance-related issues. Since supporting members "are not present on a daily basis, they are less informed of the needs, challenges and economic realities of the cooperative" (p. 1389). Although their study of 14 solidarity co-ops in Quebec reveals mostly positive impacts and perceptions of supporting members, Michaud & Audebrand (2018) caution solidarity co-operatives to approach governance with an awareness of the paradoxical position of supporting members as both insiders and outsiders to the co-op: "the diversity of the stakeholder base is... an advantage for and a threat to cooperatives' sustainability" (p. 1393). Although supporting members link solidarity cooperatives to other organizations, thereby tapping into a network of resources, their inclusion also raises a number of questions: how can an "outsider" effectively participate in the governance of an organization they are not otherwise a part of? Does sharing ownership with representatives of outside organizations undermine the Rochdale principle of autonomy and independence? If any "interested party" can be a solidarity cooperative member, does this blur the line between cooperatives, which are member-owned, and non-cooperative entities, which may have outside controlling interests?

Within The Hive, the inclusion of multiple groups of stakeholders in its governance structure has been key to the organization's longevity and resilience. For example, the expertise and resources offered by different classes of members have helped the Hive weather the financial pressures of the food service industry as well as the multiple, extended closures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic that have shuttered so many other businesses in Montreal. User member representatives on the

board of directors with financial skills and grant-writing experience successfully applied for government assistance and grants during this period, allowing The Hive to cover fixed costs while revenue had come to a standstill. However, it is this same diversity of perspectives, agendas, and levels of embeddedness within the organization that has led to tension, barriers to governance, and disillusion among members of The Hive.

The ethical appeal to increasing the number of stakeholders involved in decision-making is by no means limited to the co-operative or planning sectors. The belief that inclusion—be it of workers or any other “interested party”—can mitigate the ill effects of a market-oriented economy is pervasive in conservative, moderate, and progressive spheres alike, where this approach is applied to everything from corporate governance to managing global capitalism itself (see chapter 2, section 5). The belief that inclusion alone can square the circle of the market is a half-measure at best and cynical whitewashing at worst. For solidarity co-operatives, diversity of membership should be viewed as a tool that can be strategically employed to achieve social goals, rather than a social goal itself.

5.2.3 The Knowledge Gap: Discussion

Despite a prevailing view among interviewees that the solidarity co-op model improves organizational democracy relative to non-cooperative structures, all identified barriers to the full realization of democracy at The Hive. Several focused on a lack of education and training as a primary barrier to democracy within The Hive. Co-op

members can “misunderstand the system” and “don’t know where to start”, said a former general coordinator. A former board president pointed to “a lack of understanding about what the model is” and added that “a lot of people projected their own understanding of what co-ops are supposed to be.” Similarly, a former coordinator of The Hive’s free lunch program noted that “a lot of people don’t really understand what a multi-stakeholder co-op is.” These gaps in understanding, coupled with the bureaucratic nature of decision-making within The Hive, have often made navigating the organization’s governance structure challenging for the large majority of co-op members who have limited prior experience with solidarity co-operatives (see Figure 1). Although The Hive currently implements mandatory training for all new board members and worker members, a number of interviewees identified a need for further training in order to foster a more democratic culture within the organization, while also acknowledging the cost-related limitations of such interventions. Currently, worker members—both returning and incoming—are expected to participate in an annual, paid training session that covers practical skills—operating The Hive’s point of sale (POS) system, preparing food and coffee—and offers information on what it means to be a cooperative member. This includes the difference between solidarity and single-party co-operatives, the Rochdale principles, organizational structure, how to write a proposal, and a brief history of The Hive. While this training is thorough, it presents worker members with a large amount of sometimes complex information that few will have opportunities to put into practice, resulting in a loss of familiarity with these subjects over time.

HIVE CAFÉ CO-OP STRUCTURE

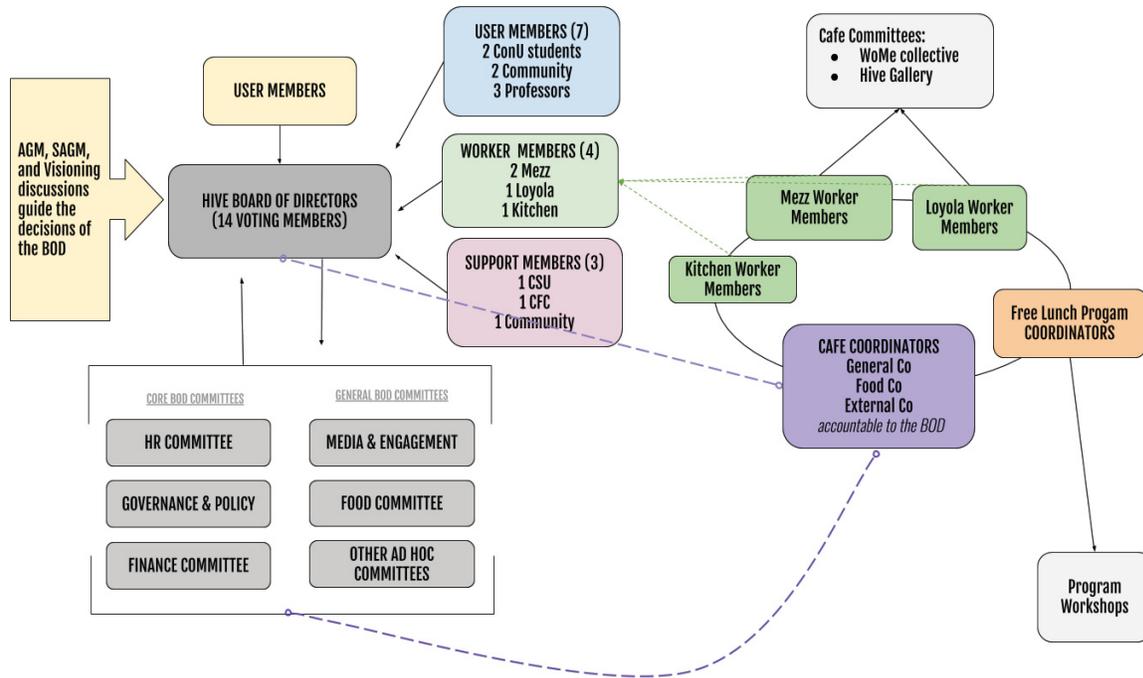


Figure 1: A slide from *The Hive's* onboarding training for new employees that highlights the large amount of sometimes complex information trainees take in.

Several interviewees highlighted some of the difficulties that can arise from this lack of organizational understanding. “If you don’t know what the process is, you feel like no one is listening to you”, said a former worker member board representative, who also added, “it needs to be way more transparent than it is.” A former user member board representative explains, “if you know the ins and outs of the bureaucracy, it can be navigated much more easily than if you do not.” This interviewee expands upon this observation this in a hypothetical scenario:

“if it’s your first time at a board meeting, you’re a worker member [and] you have a motion you want to bring forward, it involves changing a by-law, for example.

That's not something you can just do on the spot, your motion fails because your by-law has to be brought to the governance committee, they have to look at it and review it, they have to add context and maybe amendments, bring it back to the committee, then it would be sent to the GA [General Assembly], they would vote on it"

Another interviewee describes similar challenges a co-op member may face navigating governance structures at The Hive: "as a user member coming in, you've probably never written policy, you're not familiar with Quebec law, you're not going to take that role and even if you do, you're going to be at best an observer." This interviewee also explained how some of these challenges played out in their own experience: "I joined finance committee and I was just watching. What can I realistically input here? I don't know the prices of anything. The number means nothing to me. I had no baseline." This points to divisions not only between "experienced" and "inexperienced" co-op members, but also between different types of co-op member within the solidarity co-operative model. In this instance, the interviewee—a supporting member—struggled to meaningfully participate in financial decisions as they lacked the working knowledge of The Hive's budget that other types of members, such as worker members, are more familiar with through day-to-day experience. Although solidarity co-operatives operate on a "one member, one vote" principle, comments from interviewees suggest that democratic participation at The Hive is significantly more nuanced.

Among decisions that are made by The Hive's board of directors, those that are financial in nature are often both the most consequential and the most challenging for

members to contribute to. As drafting budgets, preparing financial statements, filing taxes, and interfacing with granting agencies, banks, and auditors often require more specialized skills than other aspects of co-operative management, input into these types of decisions is often limited to a small group of members. As a result, there is a tendency for power to concentrate within The Hive's Finance Committee (or "FinCom"), whose decision-making processes may be perceived as impenetrable relative to other committees. Within The Hive's internal mandates, FinCom "is empowered by the BoD to take action to financially safeguard the co-operative"⁴ and is responsible for preparing both the annual budget and bi-annual financial reports. Through these responsibilities, FinCom has significant influence over The Hive's expenditures, including wages (for detailed description of Finance Committee's responsibilities, see Appendix 3).

The Hive's human resources (HR) committee provides a similar example. As this committee oversees all matters relating to hiring, discipline, and dismissal, its activities make it a powerful and important arm of the board of directors. However, it requires a specific set of skills, both interpersonal and technical: policy must be carefully interpreted (and sometimes written) and sensitive situations must be navigated tactfully. This committee sometimes requires a significant time commitment, both in times of conflict and during periods of increased hiring (at the beginning of a new semester, for example). As a result, The Hive's HR committee, much like its Finance Committee, tends to require its members possess relevant skills and experience in order to operate smoothly. Although all board members are expected to join at least one committee, there is a significant difference in the power that is held by committees such as FinCom and HR and the power held by the growing committee, which is tasked with watering the

⁴ [Finance Committee Mandate and Description](#)

plants in the café, for example.

This knowledge disparity between co-op members who are able to navigate The Hive's organizational structure and those who are not (for a variety of reasons) was a key barrier to democratic participation identified by several interviewees. One interviewee, a former worker member representative, acknowledges that some co-op members have louder voices than others within the organization: "we were the ones with board of governor's experience and knew how to navigate that kind of language", noting that certain members possess "a level of comfort with governance structures and systems of power that is necessary to navigate a solidarity co-operative." This interviewee also explains that "at the Hive is very easy for people to say 'I don't know what's going on, I don't feel comfortable, I feel like I don't know what I'm doing so I'm just going to not get involved'."

The previously mentioned high turnover rate at The Hive—a factor of being a service industry enterprise staffed primarily by students—can compound this "knowledge gap" issue. "When you constantly have a turnover of staff... you end up culturally replicating a lack of knowledge," notes a former president of The Hive's board of directors. "We were getting people up to speed and then they would leave," explains another former board member. As a consequence, it is likely that "a large part of [The Hive's] board is going to consist of inexperienced members" at any given time, adds another interviewee, who explains this using their own experience on the board of directors: "as of next month I've been on the board for two years and I'm starting to become comfortable in my position at The Hive... but two years is generally when most people leave The Hive."

For some interviewees, this “knowledge gap” had a detrimental impact on the organizational culture at The Hive. “Problems arise in situations where the experienced board members are a little more set in their ways or have a certain idea of how something should be done... because some members are more experienced and people lean on them for different things, challenging them becomes taboo” explained one interviewee, who adds, “when I came in, I felt spoken down to.” Another interviewee reports similar observations: “[a] lack of knowledge can sometimes result in people being condescended to.” Among more experienced members of The Hive, there is often an attitude of “we decided this and we have a voting majority and we can talk you down because we know the structures of the board,” recalls a former worker member. A former president of The Hive’s board of directors corroborates this dynamic, stating that members who lacked adequate context for decision making were sometimes “guilted into making concessions” at board meetings and admits that “within the board...there are power structures beyond the allocation of seats.” Some members simply “go along with” decisions that are not fully understood, voting in their favour rather than abstaining or asking for more information, either out of self-consciousness or discomfort breaking with consensus. Putting it bluntly, one interviewee states, “there’s realistically two classes of board members: the first class being the experienced and the second class being the inexperienced board members”

Several interviewees spoke of the way these power dynamics shaped the culture of The Hive for worker members in particular. One former worker member board representative explains that “board members who had been there for a long time and had specific visions of what The Hive should look like often had clashes with workers for

whom this was a job and a way of paying rent” and that conflicts often “fell along lines of material needs versus the grand vision and the dream of The Hive.” Similar observations were made by others, including non-worker members. A user member who was involved with the founding of The Hive explains this dynamic: They [more long-term members] have this larger vision for the entirety of the food system on campus and that may come into conflict with the immediate needs of the café.” Another founding member of The Hive—a supporting member—gives a hypothetical example of how this may play out: “I’m seeing the big picture; I want the Hive to exist for 30 years and you’re trying to figure out if you’re going to get your lunches paid or not.”

Of course, this dynamic is not necessarily indicative of disregard for workers’ needs or a matter of one group imposing its will on another, but rather a question of “what’s the degree of making workers happy and what’s the degree of being fiduciarily responsible?”, according to a former general coordinator of The Hive. Other interviewees also tempered these concerns with acknowledgement that institutional memory and experience within The Hive is important, and that there are sometimes issues with newer members “just walking in and thinking [they’re] going to change the whole organization.” However, there is an important distinction between the unilateral imposition of one’s will and a genuine path to participation, which some worker members feel is lacking.

5.2.4 The Knowledge Gap: Analysis

In addition to—and perhaps even more so than—tensions between formal categories of co-op member within the structure of the solidarity co-operative (i.e., between user, worker, and supporting members), interviewees identified persistent conflict between informal categories of member: experienced and inexperienced. This conflict most often fell along lines of perceived imbalances in access to power within the organization. For newer members of The Hive, or those with limited prior experience with co-operatives, there is often a feeling of being unheard. Lacking familiarity with the language, conventions, and legal aspects of co-operative management, many interviewees spoke of feeling more like observers than participants in the governance of The Hive during their initial years in the organization. In some cases, interviewees spoke of feelings of intimidation, describing instances in which they were spoken down to or condescended to by more experienced members. Exacerbating these problems is a tendency for members to leave the organization before developing the skills necessary to effectively navigate the more bureaucratic aspects of The Hive, whether through frustration or simply a result of the transitory nature of student-led organizations. These issues are not limited to co-operatives or even to the social economy more generally. Any workplace will no doubt have varying levels of experience among its workers—it takes time to “learn the ropes”. However, solidarity co-ops have an added layer of difficulty compared to traditional workplaces, as employees must not only learn “the job” but also learn to navigate a sometimes complex and bureaucratic governance structure as co-op members if they wish to participate in governance in a

meaningful sense.

During the interview process, divisions along lines of experience emerged as particularly impactful for The Hive’s worker members, who often find themselves at a disadvantage relative to other types of members in this regard. Supporting members, as representatives of other socially-oriented organizations, will often possess a degree of familiarity with this style of governance. This is also often true of The Hive’s user member representatives. In The Hive’s case, the pool of user members is particularly large⁵ and as such, user member representatives tend to be those with prior co-operative experience and longstanding relationships with The Hive rather than average patrons of the café. Worker members, on the other hand, tend to be hired primarily on the basis of their relevant work-related skills—kitchen experience, customer service, etc.—rather than experience with co-operatives or similar organizations. Although prior co-operative experience is viewed as an asset for potential worker members, it is often trumped by kitchen experience when there are limited candidates who possess both—ultimately, the cafés need to run smoothly in order for the co-operative to continue to operate. Because of this, worker members, as a group, may experience more difficulty navigating The Hive’s governance structure, and therefore influencing its operations, than other types of member (see Table 3 for a visual representation of these distinctions). These types of barriers were observed in two case studies of solidarity co-operatives carried out as part of another recent master’s thesis specifically focused on worker members: “factors specific to the individual (e.g. knowledge of management and finance) can modify his or her participation in the decisions of the board of directors and their ease in participating in them” (Gaudet,

⁵ Anyone who purchases a \$10 membership, which also acts as a discount card for the café, is a user member.

2020, p. 137)

This dynamic can be observed in the composition of the two previously mentioned board committees. Both The Hive’s finance and human resources committees, two of its most powerful, have each experienced long periods without worker member representation. The significant time and experience required to meaningfully participate in either of these committees is a major barrier to worker members in particular, as their primary demographic—undergraduate service workers—is less likely to be predisposed to this type of work than those of user and supporting members. Worker members have been similarly underrepresented in significant officer roles—such as President and Treasurer—throughout The Hive’s history. The underrepresentation of worker members within these key committees and roles is particularly noteworthy, as their operations directly impact the material realities of work at The Hive. Members’ economic participation is one of the seven Rochdale principles, and according to the International Cooperative Alliance, this principle means that “members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative” (ICA, n.d.). If certain types of member are disproportionately left out of financial decision-making processes—even unintentionally—this runs contrary to the spirit of this principle.

Table 3: Likelihood of Cooperative Experience by Member Type

Type of Member	“Pool” of candidates for BoD representation	Relative likelihood of prior co-op experience for BoD representatives
User	Anyone who purchases a \$10 Hive lifetime membership. i.e. thousands of students, faculty, and community members associated with Concordia University.	Moderate
Supporting	Representatives of other student groups, co-ops, and socially-oriented enterprises.	High
Worker	10-20 employees of The Hive. Primarily students with food service backgrounds.	Low

Source: Author

The expansion of stakeholder networks, which can help with the issue of scalability that has long nagged the co-operative sector, is beginning to be interrogated along these lines. For example, Rodrigues & Schneider (2021) ask, “[c]an multistakeholder networks enable diverse participants, with varying access to privilege and resources, to share wealth and power equitably?” (p. 50). Similar issues have been raised regarding the inclusion of workers on the boards of directors of corporations, a policy aimed at making capitalism more “accountable” (Warren, 2018)—namely, that the mere inclusion of workers within these systems, without true empowerment, is a hollow, token gesture (PressProgress, 2021).

Naturally an organization will want experienced and skilled leaders at the helm

and the ideal of parity between co-op members is just as much an “unrealisable fantasy” (Gunder, 2003, p. 239) as the assumption of empowerment through inclusion alone. However, this should not limit the interrogation of the premises of the solidarity co-operative. The “one member, one vote” principle is widespread in the co-operative movement (Reynolds, 2000) and is touted as a cornerstone of its democratic strength (International Cooperative Alliance, n.d.). However, this principle, which is embedded within the structure of solidarity co-operatives via Quebec’s Cooperatives Act, is an oversimplification that erases disparities along many lines. Allowing large groups to become co-operative members—workers, consumers, and anyone with even a loose interest in the goals of the co-op—does not automatically create a grand Athenian polis. The Hive has thousands of members, yet the relatively small sample of members interviewed for this thesis represent a significant proportion of those who could reasonably be said to have significant leadership roles within The Hive since its inception.

Although issues arising from the “knowledge gap” are not explicitly tied to any structural element of the solidarity co-operative model in particular, nor are they unique to this sector, they do have important implications for the nature of democracy within solidarity co-operatives. At The Hive, careful consideration is given to composition of its board of directors, with efforts to ensure each member type receives fair representation. For example, there are more user member representatives (seven) than worker member representatives (four) because there are more user members than worker members. This breakdown of member representation, along with other more specific rules for the composition of The Hive’s board of directors, are set out in the

organization's by-laws, which are occasionally re-worked (subject to adoption by general assembly) as needed. However, these questions of fairness in representation are primarily numerical in nature. Both The Hive's by-laws (see section 5.2-5.6) and the Cooperatives Act (see section 226.6) aim to prevent the board of directors from being composed of too many—or not enough—of each type of member, without consideration given to the imbalances between members discussed in the preceding sections of this thesis. The assumption of parity between membership types is both structural, through by-laws and the Cooperatives Act, as well as day-to-day, as the “one member, one vote” principle is used when decisions cannot be reached through consensus.

The two broad types of democratic imbalances identified within this thesis each rest upon a foundational, but flawed, assumption of the solidarity co-operative model. The interplay of these assumptions can disadvantage the worker member relative to other members. Not because worker members must compromise with other members, but because of the structure through which this compromise is mediated. Inter-member imbalances—those between distinct types of member—stem from the assumption that compromise between groups of stakeholder will naturally result in a mutually favourable equilibrium. Imbalances related to the “knowledge gap” stem from the assumption that all parties—whether those within the “free market” or within a solidarity co-operative—enter into these forums on an even playing field and with “perfect information”. If worker members are disadvantaged in their ability to navigate and meaningfully participate in the governance structures of solidarity co-operatives relative to user and supporting members, then they are likewise at a disadvantage in their ability to broker compromise.

5.3 Paths Forward: Examples from the Case Study

Despite the issues addressed in the preceding sections, The Hive has, over time, attempted to ensure representational fairness and harness the strengths of its membership—attempts that have been enshrined in the organization’s by-laws in a number of ways. One way The Hive works toward this goal is through mandates involving the structure of its board of directors. For example, The Hive’s by-laws mandate that workers from its downtown and Loyola campus locations, in addition to its production kitchen, have representation at the board level. This ensures that the concerns of each group of workers—who often have little day-to-day interaction—are reflected in The Hive’s decision-making process. Similarly, The Hive’s by-laws mandate that two of its three supporting member directors represent particular organizations—the Concordia Student Union and the Concordia Food Coalition—whose goals and operations are closely linked to The Hive’s, ensuring this voting bloc is attuned to both the organization’s needs and its procedures.

Recently, the Hive has also implemented by-laws pertaining to voting procedure which aim to address some of the democratic questions that arise from the unique structure of solidarity cooperatives. Most notable among these by-laws is 5.9.c.14:

“Worker member candidates shall be elected solely by worker members. User member candidates shall be elected solely by user members. Support member candidates shall be elected by all categories of membership.”

Prior to the adoption of this by-law, The Hive's directors, regardless of member type, were elected by the co-op's membership at large. This raised concerns, particularly among worker members, about fairness in representation. User members, who greatly outnumber worker members, had the ultimate say in which worker members became directors, while worker members argued (ultimately successfully) that they should be the ones selecting their representatives. This by-law prevents either group of member from "packing the AGM" with voting members to influence the composition of the board of directors by outnumbering each other. It also ensures that supporting member directors *are* elected by membership at large, as this group is particularly small at The Hive (often just 2-3 members) and, as representatives of external organizations, should be vetted by all types of member.

Another measure introduced by The Hive to address structural issues is paying the chair of the human resources committee to both liaise with the board of directors and carry out the day-to-day operations of the committee. This is a noteworthy break from convention, as all other committee positions within The Hive's board of directors are filled on a volunteer basis. This ensures that the duties of this particularly important role are carried out in the timely and consistent manner that they require. Conversations are currently underway at The Hive regarding the hiring of an external HR committee chair, which would address issues of impartiality and access that have impacted the efficacy of the position in the past.

While not perfect, these measures demonstrate the ways a solidarity cooperative can begin to address the challenges that arise from multi-stakeholder governance through flexibility and a willingness to adapt to issues as they arise. However, if these

issues are not first understood, they cannot be meaningfully addressed. This also applies to training, a potential solution discussed by many interviewees. If training is not understanding of—and responsive to—these aforementioned challenges, it will only further entrench them within incoming membership.

6.0 Conclusions

The rapid growth of Quebec's solidarity co-operative model is an intriguing case for those studying the social economy and a source of optimism for those who wish to see workers exercise greater control and autonomy in their workplaces. But as this model increases its share of Quebec's co-operative sector, its structural innovations—and their implications for workers—must be subject to critical examination.

Existing literature on solidarity co-operatives has demonstrated the utility of this model and its successes since its inception in Quebec in the mid-1990s. Co-operatives face significant competition from market-oriented enterprises and must innovate in order to be resilient in the face of these pressures. Multi-stakeholder networks have shown to be an effective means of scaling up (Rodrigues & Schneider, 2021) and in Quebec, the solidarity co-operative model, which takes advantage of this strategy, has played a significant role in expanding the social economy in recent decades. This model's ability to form networks, both across the social economy and across physical space, has been key to its proliferation. However, stability and growth are just two of many goals of the co-operative sector. While successes on these fronts should be celebrated, it must also be asked "at what cost do they come?"

The case study at the centre of this thesis has demonstrated that the strengths of the solidarity co-operative model can also be its weaknesses. While the input and participation of all parties involved with a co-operative's operations makes it more inclusive and responsive than single-party co-operatives, this polyphony of voices also introduces new avenues of tension into the governance structure of a solidarity co-operative and creates opportunities for imbalance between co-operative members

that have received only limited examination in literature on this emerging form. The often oppositional desires of worker members and user members must “compete” within this governance structure, not only with each other, but also with the varying agendas of supporting members, who primarily represent external organizations and may not directly use the services of the co-operative like traditional co-op members. Further complicating matters is that these different types of member may have differential access to power within the governance structure of solidarity co-operatives, leaving some with limited ability to participate in the process of compromise that is at the heart of multi-stakeholder governance. In this sense, workers at The Hive face a two-tiered challenge: not only must they advocate for their interests while compromising with the interests of other membership types, but they must do so from an already *compromised* position due to the challenges they face navigating the organization’s governance structure. Although governance of single-party co-operatives is also impacted by power differentials between members, solidarity co-operatives and other MSCs are unique in that differences between members are formalized in their structure. The case study of The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative has demonstrated how these barriers can be particularly impactful for worker members, who at times struggle to participate in governance at the same level as other types of member and who seldom fill key leadership roles beyond by-law mandated board representative positions within the organization. This creates a democratic imbalance that is not adequately addressed by the general co-operative principle of “one member, one vote”, nor by The Hive’s by-laws. Although meaningful worker participation on the boards of directors of solidarity co-operatives is not impossible, it should not be taken for granted that the

presence of workers alone will achieve this goal. While this idea has been critiqued as simplistic or tokenistic when employed in corporate and political spheres (see chapter 2, section 5), it remains largely unchallenged in writing on solidarity co-operatives.

While the case study of The Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative has demonstrated some of the limitations of the solidarity model, it has also provided examples of how solidarity cooperatives can begin to address some of the issues raised in this thesis. Quebec's Cooperatives Act allows for significant discretion in structuring solidarity cooperatives, imposing few limitations on a solidarity co-op's by-laws and general operational procedures. This leniency should be taken advantage of in order to limit the potential for imbalances and ensure a healthy democratic culture by those who establish solidarity co-ops and draft their by-laws. Some examples of this type of strategic structuring aimed at mitigating imbalances in governance are outlined in Chapter 5, Section 3. In addition to the measures outlined in this section, efforts to further invest in training and increase meaningful worker participation in governance, including through participation in key committees, may serve as long term, organizational goals for The Hive.

The criticisms contained within this thesis are not meant as a defeatist critique of the model, nor an attempt to broadly claim that solidarity cooperatives fail workers, but rather an effort to identify novel issues that can arise from this relatively novel model. This is undertaken as a solidarity cooperative member myself, with the intention of making the solidarity cooperative a more effective tool at the disposal of workers who seek democratic control of their workplace and for those working to build the social economy in general.

Of course, the social economy and cooperative sector are enormously broad categories. For some, co-ops are a means of carving out an immediate non-capitalist niche—to operate in radical opposition to the market. But for others, co-ops are part of a long-term project to push the economy in a generally fairer direction. A cynical interpretation of this latter approach may consider it to be a watering-down or institutionalization of a truly transformative economic form. The leaders of the Paris Commune would likely have little common ground with the executives of Desjardins Group, to use an exaggerated example. Where does the solidarity cooperative fit along this spectrum? The answer is highly contingent on the particularities of each individual cooperative: its goals, its by-laws, its governance structure, its membership, its day-to-day operations, and the sector in which it operates, to name just a few. While some of these factors are fixed, many are highly flexible and subject to the decisions of a cooperative’s founders, its directors, and its general assembly. Each of these parties should be aware not only of the unique structural elements of the solidarity cooperative model and the challenges they present, but also the power they wield in shaping the direction of their organization. For workers, solidarity cooperatives can replicate some aspects of market-oriented relationships that define “traditional” workplaces, while also offering an avenue for empowerment that far exceeds what is offered outside of the cooperative sector. The extent to which either of these ends is realized is similarly contested. Worker empowerment is not an inherent product of participation or inclusion in governance, but rather a goal that can only be achieved through its active pursuit by co-op members, including worker members.

While this case study has demonstrated some of the barriers worker members

can face within a multi-stakeholder governance structure, this thesis does not make the claim that workers necessarily *will* face these barriers or be disadvantaged relative to other types of member. Other solidarity co-operatives may see this dynamic play out in a variety of ways depending on their specific circumstances. For example, a solidarity co-op with highly professionalized worker members or those who have backgrounds in co-operative governance and a small pool of user members who generally lack this background may find themselves in a situation where user members struggle to participate meaningfully in governance, rather than worker members. The focus on worker members in this case study—and in this thesis more generally—stems from both the specific makeup of The Hive’s membership and my own background as a worker member at The Hive, which has greatly informed the lines of inquiry that provide the foundation of this research project.

While The Hive’s unique position—a primarily student-run organization with a large user base and relatively small, transient workforce—makes it a particularly interesting case study of the struggles of worker members within solidarity cooperatives, it also makes it impossible to universalize insights that result from its study. The Hive is just one of hundreds of solidarity cooperatives in Quebec and as such, the findings from this thesis should be contextualized among other case studies and broader surveys of solidarity cooperatives within Quebec, both past and future. Recent work on solidarity co-operatives by Michaud and Audebrand (2019) and Gaudet (2020) offer opportunities for such contextualization, presenting in-depth case studies that examine the roles of supporting members and worker members, respectively. While the case study of The Hive seeks to contribute to this literature by centering on the *struggles* faced by workers

navigating the *governance structure* of solidarity cooperatives—and how these issues stem from this very structure —more work is required to realize a more complete understanding of these issues. This future work could include broader surveys of solidarity cooperative members, including of worker members, in order to better understand governance dynamics from a “rank-and-file” perspective. Although this thesis examines worker exclusion from a number of perspectives, exploration of additional axes of exclusion including, but not limited to, gender and race, will further strengthen understanding of the challenges faced by workers in this sector. In general, future work undertaken on this subject should aim to further understand the position of workers within multi-stakeholder cooperatives and to develop strategies for workers to seize the potential of this growing and useful model.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Escaping the social economic enclave? Examining the solidarity cooperative model in Quebec [working title]

Researcher: Jacob Ryan

Participant:

Date:

Level of Anonymity:

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. What is your role/position within the cooperative? How long have you held this position?

2. What is your understanding of the solidarity cooperative model? What do you feel are its strengths and weaknesses based on your experiences?

3. [For those involved in the establishment of the cooperative] What factors made you choose the solidarity cooperative model over other types of cooperative models?

4. Do you think the solidarity cooperative makes your organization more or less democratic than a traditional workplace? More or less democratic than a traditional, single-party cooperative (e.g. worker coop, consumer coop)? In what specific ways?

5. What barriers exist in your organization that impede workplace democracy, if any?

6. Do you feel that [worker/user/support] members have adequate and fair access to the governance/decision-making processes of your organization?

7. What changes would you make to improve workplace democracy in your organization? What barriers would make these changes difficult to implement, if any?

8. Do you perceive tension between the different constituent groups of your organization [user vs. worker vs. support member, board members vs. rank-and-file, paid vs. unpaid members, salary vs. waged, coordinators vs. non-coordinator, etc.]? What do you feel are the implications of this/these tension[s]?

9. Do you have any questions for me? About the purpose/motivation of this research? Anything else you would like to say about your organization/about solidarity cooperatives?

Appendix 2: Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative Official By-Laws

HIVE CAFÉ, SOLIDARITY COOPERATIVE

PROPOSED BY-LAW

BY-LAW NUMBER 1



By Law Version 1	July 3, 2014
By Law Version 2	November 23, 2015
By Law Version 3	September 28th, 2017
By Law Version 4	October 23rd, 2019

HIVE CAFÉ, SOLIDARITY COOPERATIVE

PROPOSED BY-LAW

BY-LAW NUMBER 1

Vision

The Hive Cafe Solidarity Co-op envisions accessible food systems that are socially, economically, as well as environmentally regenerative that are operated locally and democratically.

Mission

The mission of the Hive Cafe Co-op is to be a model food system at Concordia University that provides food through sustainable practices and empowers the student community.

Values

At the Hive Cafe we value:

- HEALTHY FOOD that is organic, locally grown, and varied
- JUST FOOD that is accessible, affordable and ethically sourced
- SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES that are socially, economically, and environmentally sound.
- FAIR REPRESENTATION of the diversity of our members, stakeholders and community.
- Strong ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY to our members, stakeholders and community.
- EMPOWERING STUDENTS as vital actors in the decision-making process
- Upholding FAIR LABOUR RELATIONS, WORKER & VOLUNTEER RIGHTS within the Hive Cafe.

- Cultivating a GROWTH MINDSET at the Hive Cafe through continuous learning opportunities.
- Nurturing SAFER COMMUNITY SPACES that are welcoming and non-judgemental and promote inclusion.

CHAPTER I: DEFINITIONS

1.1 Definitions

In this document, the following terms designate:

- a) **Executive Officers :**
The president, vice-president and the secretary.
- b) **General Assembly (GA) :**
The annual or special meeting of the members of the Co-op.
- c) **The Board:**
The Board of Directors of the Co-op.
- d) **The Co-op:**
Café Hive Coopérative de Solidarité
Hive Café Solidarity Cooperative
- e) **Student:**
Any person who is registered in at least one course at the University.
- f) **The law :**
The Cooperatives Act (L.R.Q. chapter C-67.2).
- g) **Support Member :**
A person or organization which has an economic, cultural or social interest in the mandate of the Co-op.
- h) **Worker Member :**
A person who is employed in any capacity by the Co-op.
- i) **User Member:**
Anyone who has an active membership with the cafe.
- j) **Policy :**

Any policy adopted by the Board of Directors.

- k) **By-law:**
Any by-law adopted at the General Assembly of the Co-op

- l) **University :**
L'Université Concordia
Concordia University

CHAPTER II: SOCIAL CAPITAL

(Refer to articles 37 to 49.4 and 226.4 of the Law)

2.1 Qualification Shares

To become a Member of the Co-op, any individual, group or company must subscribe to the number of qualification shares corresponding to their respective member category as outlined below:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number of Social Shares</u>	<u>Total Amount</u>
User Member	1	\$10.00
Worker Member	1	\$10.00
Support Member	10	\$100.00

2.2 Methods of Payment

For user members and worker members, social shares are payable by cash, debit or credit card at the moment of admission as a Member. Support members can pay their shares by cash, via the internal transfer account of Concordia University, or by cheque, following an invoice and within the period stipulated in the billing.

2.3 Transfer of Shares

Social shares are non-transferrable.

2.4 Refund of Social Shares

Subject to the restrictions provided in article 38 of the law, the refund of social shares is given based on the following priorities:

- a) Death of the Member;
- b) Resignation;
- c) Expulsion;
- d) Refund of Social Shares other than Social Capital Qualification Shares.

2.5 Refund of Social Shares other than Social Capital Qualification Shares

Subject to the restrictions provided in article 38 of the law, the Board can refund amounts of its social shares other than its social capital qualification shares. A user member is considered to have given up their social shares if they have not conducted business with the Co-op for two (2) years, or two (2) years after having left Concordia University.

2.6 Preferred shares

The Board is authorised to issue preferred shares and to determine their characteristics.

2.7 Repayment of preferred shares

Subject to the restrictions set out in section 38 of the Act, the repayment of the preferred shares is performed according to the conditions set out by the board in compliance with section 46 of the Act.

CHAPTER III: MEMBERS

(Refer to articles 51 to 60.2 and 226.1 of the law)

3.1 Condition of admission as User Member

To become a User Member of the Co-op, an individual must:

- a) Be a student, faculty, staff or community member of Concordia University who uses the Co-op's services.
- b) Pay the minimum amount stipulated in article 2.1 of the existing by-laws and in accordance with article 2.2.
- c) Comply with article 51 of the law.

3.2 Condition of admission as Worker Member

To become a Worker Member of the Co-op, an individual must:

- a) Be a person who is employed in any capacity by the Co-op.
- b) Pay the minimum amount stipulated in article 2.1 of the existing by-laws and in accordance with article 2.2.
- c) Comply with article 51 of the law.

3.3 Condition of admission as Support Member

To become a Support Member of the Co-op, an individual must:

- a) Be a person or group which has an economic, social or cultural interest in the mandate of the Co-op.
- b) Pay the minimum amount stipulated in article 2.1 of the existing by-laws and in accordance with article 2.2.
- c) Comply with article 51 of the law, excluding paragraph 1 of this article for support members.

3.4 Expulsion of members

The Board of Directors is authorized to expel a member, subject to articles 57, 58 and 60.

CHAPTER IV: ASSEMBLY OF THE MEMBERS

(Refer to articles 63 to 79 of the law)

4.1 General Assembly

All assemblies will take place at a location and on a date decided upon by the Board, subject to articles 77, 78 and 85 of the law

4.2 Special General Assembly

A Special General Assembly of the members may also be called by the presentation of a petition signed by at least 250 members. Such petition must set out the reasons for the meeting and the specific resolutions to be considered at such meeting. The Board must hold the meeting within twenty-one (21) days from receiving the petition.

4.3 Notice of Assembly

The notice of General Assembly must be sent out by email at least fourteen (14) days before the date decided upon by the Board.

The notice of a Special General Assembly must be sent out by email at least seven (7) days before the date decided upon by the Board.

The decisions made at an assembly cannot be declared void under the pretext that the Members did not receive or read the notice of the assembly.

4.4 Voting Procedure

The vote is taken by raised hand unless it is decided otherwise by the majority of the members present at the assembly.

4.5 Quorum

The quorum for an Assembly shall consist of thirty (30) members

4.6 Proxy

Voting by proxy is not permitted.

CHAPTER V: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Refer to articles 80 to 106.1 and 226.1 of the law)

5.1 Eligibility of Members

To be eligible for a position on the Board of Directors, a member must have paid their social shares.

5.2 Composition of the Board of Directors

The Board is composed of fourteen (14) directors .

5.3 Composition of User Members

Three (3) positions are available for students, within the category of User Members.

One (1) position is available for a non-student, within the category of User Members.

Three (3) positions are available for Concordia professors.

5.4 Composition of Worker Members

Two (2) positions are available for worker members of the Loyola cafe, the Hive Free Lunch or Hive Kitchen may also occupy one (1) of the two (2) positions, within the category of Workers Members.

Two (2) positions are available for worker-members of the Downtown cafe, within the category of Workers Members.

Worker-members on the board must be students, or must have been a student within the 6-month period prior to joining the board.

5.5 Composition of Support Members

One (1) position is reserved for the Concordia Student Union.

One (1) position is reserved for the Concordia Food Coalition.

The number of Support Members elected to the Board of Directors can never exceed a third of the total number of elected Board of Directors.

5.6 Member Categories

The composition of the Board is divided into three categories which correspond to those categories outlined in article 1.1. For each category there should be the following number of directors on the Board:

<u>Categories</u>	<u>Number of Directors on the Board</u>
User Members	7
Worker Members	4
Support Members	3

5.7 Duration of Board of Directors' Mandate

The duration of an individual member of Board of Directors' Mandate is two (2) years. Notwithstanding cases in which support members have one year mandates with their respective organizations, or in the case that a worker member no longer works at the cafe.

5.8 Directors' rotation

For the first two (2) years of the foundation of the cooperative, the term of office of the directors is as follows:

- a) Four (4) positions will be up for election after the first year, five (5) positions after the second year.
- b) The Board will determine the positions that will be up for elections after the first year.
- c) The term of office of the directors elected afterward will be two (2) years.

5.9 Nomination and Election Procedure of the Board of Directors

The President or Secretary of the Co-op are president and secretary of the election, unless they are among the nominees.

- a) The assembly should appoint two scrutineers, and if applicable, a President and/or Secretary of the Election; by accepting to act in this capacity, these individuals accept their non-candidacy;
- b) The President of the election will read out the names of the former Board of Directors, indicating which category they belong to.
- c) Following this, the president will inform the assembly that:
 - 1. The members of the former Board of Directors may be re-elected;
 - 2. The members of each category can submit the candidacy of as many members as they wish;
 - 3. Each submission of candidacy is considered duly supported and uncontested;
 - 4. The President will ensure that each candidate accepts their nomination. Any refusal on the part of the candidate will eliminate them from the election;
 - 5. After this elimination, if there are more candidates than vacant seats, then the election occurs. If the number of candidates is equal to the number of vacant seats, the candidates are elected by acclamation. If the number of candidates of a category is inferior to the number of vacant seats in that category, these seats will be filled at a next annual or special general meeting;

The Board of Directors meets as often as the cooperative's interests requires, with a minimum of at least once (1) a month.

Procedure of meetings of the board shall be governed by Robert's Rule of Order (newest addition) at the discretion of the chair of the meeting except where such rules may contradict these by-laws or the law

Quorum for the meetings of the board shall be fifty (50) percent plus one (1) of the total Board of Director members.

Meetings shall be called by the secretary of the board or, barring that, any two directors.

Official notice of the meeting is given by email at least seven (7) days before the date of the meeting.

In the case of an emergency meeting, the notice of the meeting can be as short as forty-eight (48) hours in advance.

The Directors can use means of telecommunication to participate in meetings of the Board if they are unable to do it physically.

All the motions or resolutions adopted at a Board of Directors Meeting are considered valid and in order, unless it is later discovered that the nomination of a Director was marred by an inconsistency or that a Director is no longer able to maintain their position.

Board members that cannot attend a meeting must advise the Board and request to be excused at the meeting in question. If board members are not excused for three (3) meetings they are to be automatically resigned from the Board.

5.11 Committees

The Board is authorised to form committees, determine their mandates and compositions.

5.12 Dismissal or Resignation of Directors' Mandate

A director may be dismissed should the individual resign from their functions which qualified them to their representative position in the BOD. An example of such, would be a worker member elected to represent the worker members, resigning from their position; could no longer represent the worker members in the BOD.

6. If there is an election, it will be done by secret ballot. A ballot will be given to each member of the category in question, who will write the name of the candidate(s) of their choice. The number of names on the ballot must correspond to the number of empty seats in the category in question;

7. The scrutineers will count the votes obtained by each candidate and will communicate these results to the President of the election;

8. The president will declare the candidate who obtained the greatest amount of votes elected, without divulging how many votes each candidate obtained;

9. In the case of a tie, the scrutiny of the vote is resumed between the tied candidates only;

10. If after a second process of scrutiny, there is still a tie, the Director is chosen by drawing names.

11. There will be a recount if at least a third of the members present at the assembly request it. In this case, the candidates in question will bear witness to the recount;

12. The ballots will be destroyed by the Secretary of the election immediately after the scrutiny of the vote.

13. All decisions made by the President, with regards to procedure, are binding on the assembly, unless overturned by a majority vote of the members present at the assembly.

14. Worker member candidates shall be elected solely by worker members. User members candidates shall be elected solely by user members. Support member candidates shall be elected by all categories of membership.

15. When a Board Director status changes mid-term (e.g. from Worker Member to Student-User Member) and the Director wishes to continue on the Board, the Director will remain in their seat until the next annual or special general meeting. The Director must then resign from their seat at least one (1) business day prior to the general meeting. At the meeting, the person will run for a new seat following the regular procedure.

5.10 Meetings of the Board

CHAPTER VI: TASKS AND POWERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Refer to articles 112.1 to 117 of the law)

6.1 President

The President:

- a) Will chair the General Assembly and Board of Directors meetings;
- b) Will ensure that the Constitution and By-laws are observed;
- c) Will ensure that resolutions made at the General Assembly and Board of Directors meetings are carried out;
- d) Will represent the Co-op in external relations and affairs.

6.2 Vice-president

The Vice-president:

- a) Will assist the President at Board meetings;
- b) Will fill the role of chair in the absence of the President;
- c) Will execute mandates given by the Board.

6.3 Secretary

The Secretary:

- a) Will take Minutes of the General Assembly and Board of Directors Meetings; or validate Minutes as transcribed by the designated Hive Minute-Taker, wherever one is present;
- b) Will be responsible for the maintenance of the register and archives of the Co-op;
- c) Will communicate the notice of the General Assembly and Board of Directors Meetings;
- d) Will transmit to various bodies the requirements of the law;

e) Will execute all tasks inherent to its functions.

6.4 The Treasurer:

- a) Will sit on the Finance Committee;
- b) Will serve as a Signing Officer;
- c) Will be listed on the Québec Registre des Entreprises;
- d) Will be designated as a Power of Attorney in dealings with Revenu Québec;
- e) Will execute all tasks inherent to its functions.

6.5 Training for officers of the board

The Hive will provide mandatory professional facilitation and conflict resolution training to the president, vice-president, and secretary of the board, and / or at least one member of the HR committee. This training must take place as quickly as possible after they are appointed, and within the reasonable limitations of the organisations' capacity (financially, and otherwise).

CHAPTER VII: ACTIVITIES

(Refer to articles 90 and 128 to 134 of the law)

7.1 Remuneration of workers

The Board establishes the scale of remuneration and other payments of all workers of the cooperative.

7.2 Insurance

The Board must insure the Co-op in accordance with its needs.

7.3 Fiscal Year

The fiscal year begins May 1st of each year and ends on April 30th.

7.4 Duration of By-laws in Effect

7.5 Organizational Policies

The Board and cooperative members must also work in accordance with the Hive Policy Book and may, when democratically agreed upon, not withstand sections justifiably.

Date: _____
Secretary _____

- Version 1 of By-laws were effective July 3rd, 2014
- Version 2 of By-laws were effective November 23, 2015
- Version 3 of By-laws were effective September 28th, 2017
- Version 4 of By-laws were effective October 23rd, 2019

Appendix 3: Mandates and Composition of The Hive’s Board of Directors

Committees

Source: [2021-22 HIVE Organizational Schedule](#)

GENERAL Committees		
COMMITTEE	MANDATE	COMPOSITION
Finance (FinCom)	The Finance Committee (hereinafter referred to as FinCom) is hereby constituted to assist the Board of Directors (hereinafter referred to as BOD) of the Hive Cafe Co-op in fulfilling responsibilities pertaining to financially safeguarding the organization, as outlined in the responsibilities. The committee also reviews, verifies and, when applicable, approves the up-to-date financial reports and financial proposals for the cooperative. FinCom has the responsibility to oversee both the budget preparation process (ensuring a consultative process with the multi-stakeholders) and the bi-yearly financial reports for the BOD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Coordinator as Chair (non-voting) - 3 or more board members (voting) - Treasurer - One signing officer
Policy & Governance (GovCom)	The Governance and Policy Committee (hereinafter referred to as GovCom) is hereby constituted to assist the Board of Directors (hereinafter referred to as BOD) of the Hive Cafe Co-op in fulfilling responsibilities pertaining to the structure, systems and processes that provide direction, control, efficiency and accountability for the Hive Cafe Co-op, as outlined in the responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FLP Admin Coordinator as Chair (non-voting) - 1 or more worker BoD member (voting) - 1 or more user BoD member (voting) - 1 support BoD member (voting)
Human Resources (HR)	A Human Resources Committee (hereinafter referred to as the "HR Committee") is hereby constituted to assist the Board of Directors (hereinafter referred to as BoD) of the Hive Cafe Co-op in fulfilling responsibilities pertaining to the management of Hive Cafe Co-op human resources are strategically and effectively addressed. The HR committee oversees the evaluation, hiring, and dismissal, of the Hive Worker Members. They also help develop HR policies and procedure, and help with HR conflict resolution. The committee is responsible for providing support to Coordinators and Worker Members, as outlined in the responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chair (unspecified) - Fin/Ad Coordinator as Secretary (non-voting) - 3 or more non-worker board members (voting)
Marketing & Engagement (M&E)	The Marketing and Engagement (herein after referred to as M&E) Committee is hereby constituted to assist the Board of Directors (hereinafter referred to as BoD) of the Hive Cafe Co-op in fulfilling responsibilities pertaining to oversight, approval and implementation of potential marketing and engagement initiatives while maintaining the representative identity and branding for the Hive Cafe Co-op. The committee is also responsible for cultivating positive public relations, including but not limited to reviewing and addressing feedback of the membership and community at large, as it pertains to the Cooperative, as outlined in the responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cafe coordinator as Chair (non-voting) - 3 or more board members (voting)
Food Committee (FoodCom)	The Hive Food Committee (hereinafter referred to as FoodCom) is hereby constituted to assist the Board of Directors (hereinafter referred to as BOD) of the Hive Cafe Co-op in ensuring collectivity in menu management including costing, procurement, and processing of products, as outlined in the responsibilities. The HFC understands the Hive Cafe Co-op's goal of moving from a catered model to an in-house food production model, and intends to focus energy on refining and diversifying the menu in the coming years. Food policy will be created by the HFC and in collaboration with other committees, so as to ensure consistency of products and goods, and uniformity between both Hive Café locations. The HFC is also dedicated to the Hive Café Co-op's goal to be established as an official food service provider on campus in accordance with the Hive's Mission to change the Concordia University food landscape by offering the community a healthy, affordable, and sustainable alternative that is working towards becoming the university's primary food service provider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food Coordinator as Chair (non-voting) - 3 or more board members (voting)
Ad Hhoc Committee	That an Ad hoc committee of BOD members may be struck with the purpose of organizing the Special General Meeting (SGM) of the Hive Café as well as a Visioning session for members, all while producing a strategic report that outlines a short, medium and long term framework for structural changes and future developments at the Hive Café with regards to finances, food and human resources.	
Executive Committee (for Ad Hoc or Emergency)	<i>In the event of dissolution or absence of the Board of Directors, an Ad hoc committee of BOD members in executive titles may be created with the purpose of accomplishing any necessary tasks for the well-being or safe guarding of the organization and business.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Board President - Board Vice President - Board Secretary