

Fostering social capital: the case of community-owned pubs

Fostering
social capital

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the relationship between community-owned enterprises and social capital in urban neighbourhoods. Focussing on community-owned pubs (COPs), the paper investigates how social capital elements have a role in generating these innovative organizations, which foster benefits for community members.

Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative research based on data gathered through 23 semi-structured interviews, in an in-depth case study analysis of three COPs located in Carshalton, Nunhead and Tottenham (all suburbs of London).

Findings – The paper shows how COPs foster the creation and accumulation of social capital both among their members (bonding capital) and the people living in the neighbourhood (bridging capital). Because of their missions and governance models, COPs create linkages among different people and enable citizens to act together for the common good, thus strengthening the development of a local community and contributing to enhancing the urban regeneration process.

Originality/value – COPs are a recent trend, and there is a lack of scientific literature on this topic. The paper can help social scientists to understand new features of community development processes and the effects of the Localism Act (2011). Furthermore, the research can support organizations involved in assisting local communities, which aim to start up collective-owned pubs. It provides valuable scientific results, in relation to social aggregation and a positive impact on local contexts.

Keywords Social capital, Community development, Urban regeneration, Local development, Community-owned pub, Social aggregation, British pub

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Community-based enterprises (CBEs) help local civic groups to create projects for the socio-economic development of their communities (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006; Somerville and McElwee, 2011). As Bailey (2012) recognizes, CBEs constitute a sub-group within the social enterprise realm, because they foster social mission and have a non-profit status. In addition, these enterprises aggregate people who share the same place-based identity and place-based needs in defined geographical areas (Somerville and McElwee, 2011). Therefore, CBEs can be the outcome of a collective process that targets local socio-economic issues and aims to provide solutions through community participation (Wilkinson and Quarter, 1996).

CBEs involve a complexity of social relationships among both directly involved members and external stakeholders; therefore, certain aspects, such as trust and collaboration, acquire a key role in the management of these initiatives (Borzaga and Sforzi, 2015). Furthermore, CBEs can enlarge their networks and spread a major sense of social aggregation, collaboration and solidarity; this is achieved through sharing with the community the benefits derived from their



activities (Mori and Sforzi, 2018; Bianchi, 2019). These organizations require voluntarism, altruism and community commitment to be embedded in the social networks that generate the CBEs. The norms and networks that enable collective actions for communities' interests are classed as forms of social capital, which can enhance both economic development and social aggregation inside groups (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). In most cases, CBEs are designed to manage local assets and develop projects for communities (Bailey, 2012; Euricse, 2016). In the past few years, an innovative form of CBE has emerged in the UK context, namely, the *community-owned pub* (COP). For centuries, these public houses have been central, vital places for community life in the UK (Dunbar *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, new trends in the bar business sector and years of economic recession have seriously compromised the survival of many pubs (Pratten, 2007). As Cabras and Reggiani (2010) affirm, the loss of pubs can compromise local socio-economic conditions, particularly because many initiatives, which aim to strengthen social bonds inside the area, have their origins in pubs. This aspect has a key relevance in urban contexts, where thousands of people live and express the necessity for venues where they can socialize; pubs accomplish this task because people used to meet their friends there and cultivated new social relationships (SIRC, 2008). Moreover, the literature on community pubs has mainly investigated the issue in the rural context (Cabras and Reggiani, 2010; Cabras and Bosworth, 2014); therefore, an examination of urban experiences is useful for improving the debate on COPs.

These projects seem to have multiple effects on their local communities, both social and economic. The research examines this trend through two main questions:

- Q1. What are the main features of this new community-owned enterprise model?
- Q2. Does social capital have a role in generating these new organizations?

As Bertotti *et al.* (2012) underline, there is a paucity of evidence for the correlation between social capital and social enterprises; studies tend to assume rather than demonstrate the benefits that these organizations can have for social capital.

This paper aims to investigate the dynamics that interrelate the issue of pubs' decrease and the growing trend of CBEs. Around the UK, many communities have seen the CBE model as a possible solution for re-opening closed pubs as new community venues. The sociological investigation focusses particular attention on the social dynamics behind these organizations, with the aim of understanding how local civic groups can foster social aggregation within their communities. As Granovetter (1985) points out, economic structures gain embedded social relations from the contexts where they take place; this idea corroborates the sociological assumption that CBEs in general, and COPs in particular, can be studied by adopting social capital theories as a framework because they consider the value embedded in social relations.

The authors' hypothesis is that COPs emerge from collective processes inside urban communities, which take advantage of the bonding social capital. Then, the community mission and civic engagement lead these organizations to enhance the bridging social capital, thus fostering social inclusion and collaboration among participants' acquaintances and neighbours. The following sections provide a general introduction to CBEs and the social capital theories used as a framework; then, the paper introduces the research object, i.e. the case studies. Finally, the discussion analyses the findings, and the conclusion highlights the main results.

2. Community-based enterprises

As the main object of the research, CBEs require adequate investigation and understanding. This section aims to analyse the main features of these organizations to underline those elements that enable the community's benefit, and which involve social capital usage.

Firstly, it is important to comprehend the concept of “community” that underlies the CBE definition. According to [Peredo and Chrisman \(2006\)](#), “community” is defined as an aggregation of people who share the same geographical location and are generally accompanied by a collective culture and/or ethnicity. Inside these communities, local groups can act to enhance the general interest of everyone on the basis of social and solidarity values ([Mori and Sforzi, 2018](#); [Bianchi, 2019](#)). As [Ostrom \(1990\)](#) indicates, these intentions evolve into social confrontations, with the aim of devising possible solutions for managing the general interest. Ostrom suggests the co-operative way as the best resolution; nevertheless, collaboration among members requires regulation and, in most cases, formalization into organizational structures; CBEs arise from these dynamics.

Generally, CBEs are organizations where the community acts both as an entrepreneur and as an enterprise, to pursue multiple goals and activities that are capable of satisfying local needs and demands, and where the social foundation lies in the community and the activities’ impact is limited to a given location (e.g. a neighbourhood) ([Peredo and Chrisman, 2006](#); [Somerville and McElwee, 2011](#); [Mori and Sforzi, 2018](#)). According to those authors, CBEs distinguish themselves from other organizations because they are outcomes of collective processes inside communities; the community acts entrepreneurially and organizes economic activities to pursue general interests through the enterprises ([Peredo and Chrisman, 2006](#)). These initiatives converge various needs and opportunities, creating a complex structure where different stakeholders get together to resolve a common problem. Even if the whole community does not participate in CBEs, the common interest is still represented because CBEs work for the community’s benefit; this means that each resident is considered a potential beneficiary of the enterprise’s activities ([Wilkinson and Quarter, 1996](#); [Mori, 2017](#); [Mori and Sforzi, 2018](#)).

CBEs emerge as outcomes of processes led by community members who want to address local issues and aim to provide themselves and other citizens with self-reliant solutions for their problems ([Wilkinson and Quarter, 1996](#)). Moreover, CBEs’ main innovation is their enlarged view of the community; these firms do not aim simply to provide earnings to owners, such as private companies or to benefit their official members, as traditional co-operatives do; rather, they accomplish the community mission by planning their activities as solutions for potentially every citizen ([Mori, 2017](#)). In addition, [Lang and Roessl \(2011\)](#) highlight the importance of understanding the community services of community enterprises, particularly co-operatives, by contextualizing these firms into their social and cultural contexts; through their membership, these organizations can connect their functioning with the communities’ interest. As the literature suggests, behind CBEs there is a membership rooted in the local community ([Flanigan and Sutherland, 2016](#)). Certain members of these communities see potential solutions for local issues through the collaboration and aggregation; the resulting outcomes are CBEs, which provide stable resources for supporting the social benefits for their communities, by considering both members and non-members.

As it is possible to understand that social capital and CBEs are strictly connected, the former is a precondition of the latter. CBEs arise in an existing social structure where social networks facilitate certain actions of individuals or groups, promote trust, increase cooperation or reciprocal behaviour, and help in building and maintaining communities and organizations. Therefore, social networks and community issues are important elements in understanding not only the creation of CBEs but also their role in promoting social capital ([Bertotti et al., 2012](#)). Alongside this, bridging social capital helps to spread the norms, values and goals of the CBEs in the “whole community” at large, by creating new networks among members, consumers and users of goods and services; or among different local

organizations (e.g. schools, voluntary associations, etc.) that are not directly involved in the CBEs, and by building networks across “communities” (Borzaga and Sforzi, 2015).

This section provides useful insights for understanding the CBEs’ role in promoting community aggregation for self-reliant solutions to local problems. These organizations involve a large part of the local community and support citizens in a collaborative process for generating solutions for general wellness. Social capital appears as an important element in both the initial and growth phases of CBEs. As Bertotti *et al.* (2012) point out, scientific analysis needs to provide a major investigation of how social capital favours CBEs, and how participants can benefit from these initiatives. The research aims to demonstrate the role of social capital in these processes, showing how it can aggregate people on the basis of shared needs and ideas, and then spread positive effects among them.

3. Social capital as a network

The notion of social capital has a long history in social science. There is no single unified definition of social capital, and theoretical and empirical studies have deepened its study from various perspectives, according to different disciplines such as economics, sociology or political science (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1995; Putnam *et al.*, 1993, 2000; Fukuyama, 2002; Portes, 1998; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000; Hooghe and Stolle, 2003).

Despite the numerous and different definitions in social capital, a wide range of literature has discussed it in terms of a network, stressing “the relevance of interaction and networks developed among citizens and between them and public or private organizations, to generate and increase social capital” (Borzaga and Sforzi, 2015, p. 194). If social capital can be considered as a by-product of social interaction, usually initiated by other motivations or activities (e.g. to save a pub) (Putnam *et al.*, 1993), it is important to better understand, which mechanisms influence the social capital formation, and its capability to foster cooperation among citizens. For the purpose of this study, in this paper, we focus our attention on networks and we follow the distinction between two different types of social capital: bonding and bridging social capital (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

Bourdieu (1986) highlighting the relevance of social capital in terms of the network, defines social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network, consisting of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Bourdieu pinpoints *networks* as “the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). However, not all “durable relations” contribute to building social capital. An economic relation based exclusively on the economic interest of actors does not necessarily bring resources in terms of “social relations”. Only if this economic relation generates “something” that goes beyond economic exchange (e.g. trust, new networks, cooperation or reciprocity outside the economic relation), can we speak of social capital (La Valle, 2002)? As shown in the previous section, CBEs are a particular form of enterprise that aims to foster general benefits for the community and involves a multitude of diverse subjects who collaborate to achieve shared objectives. In this sense, we can see how social capital has a role in keeping these forces united.

From a different perspective, Coleman (1990) describes social capital as a resource that lies in the structure of “social relations”, as “individuals do not act independently, goals are not independently arrived at, and interests are not wholly selfish” (Coleman, 1990, p. 301). Coleman affirms that social capital:

[. . .] is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman, 1990, p. 302).

The relevance of social capital as networks is also affirmed by Granovetter (1985), who argues that economic action is embedded in concrete systems of social relations, and “the embeddedness argument stresses instead the role of concrete personal relations and structures (or “networks”) of such relations in generating trust and discouraging malfeasance” (Granovetter, 1985, p. 490). Social networks affect the flow and the quality of information; they mobilize knowledge, resources and assets, and spread norms and values. Social networks, therefore, play a key role in shaping the choices and actions of the actors (as a single or collective entity), in conditioning the emergence and evolution of institutions (which are socially constructed) and of different organizational models.

Granovetter (1973) distinguishes between *strong ties* (e.g. family or close friends, whom one knows well) and *weak ties* (e.g. remote friends or acquaintances, whom one knows casually), thus showing how different ties or relations can affect the actors’ life in society in a different ways, with different effects and benefits.

Networks based on strong ties involve “similar” actors (who share common norms and values, and have a high degree of interaction and trust); this has positive effects, as it helps to overcome fragmentation and free-riding problems and to reinforce cohesion and collective action within the network. On the other hand, networks based only on these kinds of ties tend to be more “closed” and less inclusive, in terms of maintaining a “dense and cohesive network” (Granovetter, 2005). Networks based on weak ties involve “different” actors with less interaction, and it is more difficult to spread trust among actors who do not know one another. These kinds of networks can operate as a bridge between different actors, to provide wider access to diverse and multiple resources.

The relevance of strong and weak ties is followed up by the distinction between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital (Gittel and Videl, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). The former refers to social networks between homogenous groups (e.g. family, clan and close community): “co-operative relations between members of a network who see themselves as being similar in terms of their shared social identity” (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004, p. 654). The latter concerns social networks between socially heterogeneous groups (e.g. acquaintances, neighbours and business associates): “people who know that they are not alike in some socio-demographic (or social identity) sense” (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004, p. 655). Moreover, as Rutten *et al.* (2010) point out, bonding social capital appears in networks where individuals mostly know all other members, and they are all connected. On the contrary, bridging social capital connects other unrelated actors.

Bonding social capital can be exclusive, but it is able to offer more substantive support. It can also spread a high level of trust within the network while protecting individuals and groups from “external invasion” (Fukuyama, 2002). This type of social capital helps close groups to achieve their specific goals more efficiently, facilitating cooperation, information flow and long-term reciprocity. However, strong ties or closed networks can have negative effects, thus creating boundaries against new members, and hindering the socio-economic development of a given community (Portes, 1998; Griesshaber and Geys, 2012).

By contrast, bridging social capital is more inclusive. It contributes to the circulation of information and new knowledge among the local community and extra-community networks, and it helps to construct new connections and weak ties; these are useful to increase cooperative behaviour among actors who belong to different socio-economic environments, and they allow community collective action to benefit the whole community. Nevertheless, as pointed out in the literature, it may be difficult to “develop trust in total

strangers, about whom we have no information, because we trust people we actually know” (Hooghe, 2003, p. 91). The development of bridging social capital is not an easy task, and it requires time and continuity. Bonding social capital plays a crucial role in, for instance, collective action (Bandura, 1997) and in the creation of an organization (e.g. a COP), as it facilitates mutual learning, the sharing of material and immaterial resources (e.g. financial, labour, voluntary work, knowledge or value) and working together for common purposes (Fukuyama, 2002). However, bridging social capital and participation in open networks are fundamental to increasing civic engagement, reducing opportunistic behaviour, gaining access to new knowledge and financial resources and addressing neighbourhood problems.

The creation of the trust, cooperation, solidarity behaviour and citizens’ participation within a given community is fundamental for the development of social and economic activities and can be developed by different mechanisms and sources such as public policies (or state intervention) and private and voluntary organizations (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003). To achieve this, it is fundamental to increase both the quantity and quality of social interactions within a community, to strengthen social relations and build new networks.

Only if it is supported by proper governance mechanisms (e.g. CBEs), based on specific rules and norms that are able to induce “cooperative behaviours” (e.g. reciprocity, working together for common goals, territorial embeddedness, etc.), can social capital be an important resource for collective action, social cohesion, citizens’ participation and socio-economic development.

The research can benefit from these theories, in terms of explaining the social dynamics behind COPs’ development. As the literature on CBEs explains, these collective projects involve local citizens in working together for common interests. Nevertheless, the investigation must provide a deeper examination, and identify, which kinds of social capital dynamics are occurring. Moreover, the analysis must consider the bonding and bridging social capitals, to understand whether there is an evolution towards a more open network or if it remains constrained within defined boundaries. As Westlund and Nilsson (2005) suggest, social capital can have implications for businesses; thus, it is necessary to establish how it determines the formation of COPs and their consequent functioning, such as by investigating how the different elements (strong/weak ties and bonding/bridging social capital) contribute to realizing these CBEs. The next section illustrates the main features of the COP phenomenon and explains the collective nature of these organizations.

4. The emergence of community-owned pubs in England

As part of British culture, pubs have always been an important venue for people in the UK. These are places where people can spend leisure time and increase their social interaction. There is evidence for the central role of pubs from the sixteenth century:

- they were the heart of local communities; and
- sometimes the only place where people could meet (Dunbar *et al.*, 2016).

The mass observation group in the 1930s was the first to academically define public houses: “the pub [...] is a house where during certain hours everyone is [...] participator rather than spectator” (Mass Observation, 1943, p. 17).

Despite their importance for British people, traditional public houses are suffering a deep crisis related to different factors, such as the rising taxation on beers, the decrease of consumption due to the economic crisis, the constant decrease of alcohol prices in off-licence shops, and the strong competition with the pub companies (Nicholson’s, J D Wetherspoon, Punch Tavern, Enterprise Inn). These manage hundreds of pubs and their service is

radically different from public houses, favouring fashion places, sports on TV and welcoming a wide range of customers such as tourists or business people (Pratten, 2007).

Pub companies are the main competitors for traditional public houses, which are suffering a steady decrease in numbers and an enlargement in the portion of properties owned by the pub companies. Many pubs have been unable to respond to the new demands of customers, and others were beaten by the strong competition from big companies that can operate with lower prices. Table I shows the figures for this crisis.

During recent years, different scholars have studied the relevance of these places (SIRC, 2008; Cabras and Reggiani, 2010; Muir, 2012; Markham, 2013; Cabras and Bosworth, 2014; Dunbar *et al.*, 2016). Their aim was to demonstrate the deep connections that pubs have with communities, and their capability to strengthen social cohesion. People recognize public houses as real social venues, a place to meet friends, create networks and have a good time. People used to experience the pub as a place where existing social relationships could be cultivated and new ones created (SIRC, 2008). Muir (2012) shows how people perceive pubs as “the most important social institution for promoting interactions between people from different backgrounds at the local level” (Muir, 2012, p. 33). Generally, it is possible to define a place as a *community pub* when it “serves predominately their local residential community” (CGA strategy, 2009, in Muir, 2012).

They are also considered promoters of social participation in the life of communities: for instance, many pubs host local volunteering or political groups (Muir, 2012). This consideration is vital in rural contexts where, frequently, the pub is the only social venue (SIRC, 2008; Muir, 2012; Markham, 2013; Dunbar *et al.*, 2016).

However, in recent years, the UK has witnessed a new wave. The huge crisis facing pubs is bringing people to activate themselves to save many of these historic places. Many groups of citizens are starting campaigns to reopen their local pubs, and are supporting these initiatives with the purchase of shares, and engaging in the management of these new organizations, named COPs.

The policies regarding the safety and management of community pubs are various. From 2012 to 2016, the British Government invested more than £5m in the pub loan fund (DCLG, 2015, 2016). The department for communities and the local government planned a reduction of taxation on beers and ciders, supported the leasing of pubs from pub companies to landlords and gave councils powers to levy discretionary business-rate discounts, which could support local community pubs (DCLG, 2015). Furthermore, the Localism Act 2011 supports local groups and civil society in rescuing local “community assets value” by preventing their sale on the private market and favouring acquisition by organized citizens with a credible renovation plan (DCLG, 2012).

5. Research design and methods

The research draws on three case studies located in London. As explained in previous sections, the academic debate on COPs requires a major focus on urban experiences; therefore, the research involves three pubs in different London boroughs, to show how dynamics and trends are similar, despite their geographical dislocation in the same city. A

1987	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012	2013	2014	2015
65,700	61,600	60,600	60,100	57,500	53,800	52,500	51,900	50,800

Note: ^awww.beerandpub.com

Table I.
Total number of
pubs in the UK^a

case study is a useful method of gaining insight about complex social phenomena, such as organizational processes; it facilitates the analysis of an organization through the accounts of those directly involved (the creator[s] and the stakeholder[s]) and provides insightful information on the characteristics and activities of the studied organizations (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). A cross-case study methodology has a central role in this study; it allows the analysis to grasp combinations of factors, and to compare diverse social facts, extrapolating differences and similarities (Khan and VanWynsberghe, 2008). This supports the research's intention to demonstrate how different communities replicate the same patterns in processing their necessities and devising their solutions. Therefore, the three COPs can provide a representative of urban COPs. The selection of cases consider the pub managers' availability for the research, the particularities of each case, and the geographical location in different boroughs.

The method adopted for collecting qualitative data has been semi-structured interviews. The aim of the in-depth case study analysis is twofold:

- (1) to investigate the history of pubs and the process of community engagement; and
- (2) to identify how services are set up to respond to local needs.

In each pub, the sample stakeholders represent managers, directors, community members participating as shareholders and simply customers. All were interviewed with the aim of obtaining different viewpoints from people engaged in different levels of the organizations. The face-to-face interviews enabled:

- direct confrontation with people;
- the investigation of different perspectives on the enterprise; and
- direct observation of people in the social setting (Adam, 2015).

A total of 23 interviews were conducted and recorded. The interviews explored the process of re-establishment of the pub after the previous management's closure, how communities were approached, the engagement of locals, the building of networks among different people and other organizations, and the growth of trust among members. One of the main limitations of the present study is that it does not analyse the already existing level of social capital in the three neighbourhoods where the COPs have developed their activities but instead focusses on presenting how it is possible to promote local social ties through a specific organization. The research subjects are three COPs (The Hope, The Ivy House and The Antwerp Arms) that operate in different London suburbs (Carshalton, Nunhead and Tottenham). The main features of the case studies are presented in [Table II](#).

6. Case studies

As [Table II](#) shows, this analysis investigates three case studies situated in London. First, these pubs' stories are remarkably similar: community members, who previously knew each other, got together for their shared interest in saving the local historic pub. Second, the reason for local activation was the feelings people have about these social venues. The project founders gathered former customers to avoid the loss of the loved pub, even if they could have alternatives in the neighbourhood; except in the case of The Ivy House, which represents the only social venue in Nunhead, and people felt a sense of abandonment at losing this amenity. The Antwerp Arm is historically a Tottenham Hotspur supporters' pub, just a mile down Church Road, which is the location of White Hart Lane stadium. In the first phase, the founders mainly called their strong ties to action. Then, they needed more support and involved other locals. Public events for calling to action are another point in common; founders understood the

	The Hope	The Ivy House	The Antwerp Arms
London borough	Sutton	Southwark 1871 (first record on census list)	Haringey
Foundation year	1855		1822
Conversion into COP year	2010	2013	2015
Legal form	A company limited by shares	Community benefit society	Community benefit society
Number of shareholders	45	371	360
Minimum investment	£1,000	£200	£200
Number of employees	21	18	7 full-time 3 part-time
Number of volunteers	7	0	30/40
General assemblies in 2016	2	2	1
Meeting of the general board in 2016	12	12	12
Number of interviewees	7	9	7

Table II.
Main features of the
case studies

necessity to reach a multitude of shareholders to collect the amount needed for the business project. In these first steps, it is possible to see the typical features of bonding social capital. People who already know each other because of common belonging to a specific territory (the neighbourhood) and shared experiences (former customers and dwellers in the same areas) join for a common purpose because there is a collective recognition of this need. Then, by spreading the word around, the project activates a bridging social capital.

I talked to people in the pub and said “we need to raise money and convince people to save the pub.” I negotiated the price with Punch Tavern. A lot of our shareholders are an active part of the village. A lot of groups started to meet here. So, in that way we brought here the civic society and tried to explain the idea correlated with this pub. At least three of the directors are involved in other groups and others are involved, informally, in other local organizations (Interview with director, The Hope, 2016).

The previous landlord gave a notice for closure of one week. Some of the original people of the committee started to talk about the possibility of keeping this as a pub for the local community. It started from them. Promoters applied to have the building as an asset of community value, and the Architectural Heritage Fund provided money to maintain the architectural value of this building. The neighbourhood bought the pub from the developer (Interview with director no. 1, The Ivy House, 2016).

One day we discovered that the pub was going to close and the building sold. We immediately applied for the recognition as community asset value, with the support of the council we started to raise money. We started in 2011 to understand the decline of this place and after the notice of selling we began to believe in this idea of a community pub. The tool of community asset value gave us the opportunity to engage the locals and speculate on the idea of this place as community value (Interview with director no. 2, The Antwerp Arms, 2016).

I think the reason why people invest in this pub is to keep this alive, not for profit (Interview with shareholder no. 2, The Hope, 2016).

According to all interviewees, the investment in COPs was not for economic interest or for a personal reason, but they all see the possibility of being part of a positive project in their

neighbourhood, and to be more active citizens. The immediate success of these initiatives is a shared aspect among the three cases; all the founders could see an instantaneous activation of local communities. The first step was to share the idea with close friends and old pub customers; promoters used the strong ties that connected them with reliable people. These concatenations brought more members within the project and developed the bridging social capital among locals. Secondly, the informal committees launched the call to action using their own personal relationships and the collaboration of local media, which in all the cases responded positively. This mix of strong and weak social bonds allowed the word to spread about the community-oriented projects, and quickly raised the money.

We can see how bonding social capital has evolved into bridging, to respond to a common issue. Volunteers participated in re-establishment works at The Hope and The Antwerp Arms, while The Ivy House took advantage of The Architectural Heritage Fund, which financially supported the initiative because of the high architectural value of this building. This represents another key element of social capital: collaboration and reciprocity for common purposes generate civic engagement and participation.

Most shareholders are local people who were interested in the projects: they decided to contribute not only because they recognized the historical value of these buildings but also for the possibility to support local inclusive initiatives and to be co-owners of their local pubs; the majority of the interviewees confirm these aspects. In addition, small local businesses decided to join the projects: in The Antwerp Arms project, Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and supporters groups are members, demonstrating the strong bond between the pub and the local football team. Similarly, in the Ivy House case, Truman's brewery company is a shareholder; it decided to support the project for its value, and in response, the pub has included its beers on the menu. Moreover, there is also a sense of victory in the members' words when they talk about the first steps to save the pubs. All three were awaiting demolition and replacement with new buildings; a process of renovation that did not consider locals' interests and the buildings' historical value.

They really see it as a representative of the community. It is a victory against the developers. During the past years, foreign developers have been gambled with the price of the lands. It is difficult to find apartments for living because developers must earn. In this pub, we have won against the developers (Interview with customer no. 1, The Ivy House, 2016).

The COP idea and the possibility to open the space to local stakeholders and civil society organizations has been a key point, as the beginning of the three stories. The three pubs allow local groups to use their spaces free of charge and regularly promote projects and initiatives with other organizations. The Hope hosts The Black Swan Morris, a musician and dancers group, and the ecological committee. The pub is also the distribution point for the local community farm; moreover, it raises money for local charities and is also involved in the work of the local historical society for recording local families' history. In addition, it is engaged in the organization of the annual fest "The Carshalton Straw Jack". The Ivy House organizes regular activities and a small cultural festival to animate Nunhead's social life; furthermore, it collaborates with the local primary school for after-school activities. It also hosts food assemblies, a dancers group, charities' initiatives, theatre and music shows. In Tottenham, the pub is a meeting point for many groups, such as the volunteers of the local park, and a group of amateur cyclists, which provides people with support for fixing bicycles. Everyone can present new ideas to the committee and organize their own events inside the pub.

The management and decision-making process reflects the cooperative spirit of these initiatives, which takes advantage of the participants' inclination towards a community commitment and a voluntarist spirit in participating in the COPs. Despite the different legal

forms – The Hope is a company limited by shares, while The Ivy House and The Antwerp Arms are community benefit societies – the governance is the same in all the cases. The annual general meeting elects the committee of directors, which is appointed to take strategic decisions, and managers run the pub with staff members. To achieve their community-oriented mission, all the pubs employ local workers and try to choose local suppliers where possible.

We did not choose the CIC form. I disagree with the idea “one person one vote”. People cannot have the same influence if they do not invest the same amount. The risk is that people can gamble with money of others (Interview with the licensee, The Hope, 2016).

The beers served are not a secondary issue; it is important to see in each case the presence of the local CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) branch, which has supported promoters, as the first steps. This important collaboration has led the directors to privilege local British ale instead of international commercial lager, which represents the standardization of service quality typical of pub companies. Here it is possible to see how collaboration with an external partner has determined specific choices in the pubs.

Everybody perceives this as a community asset. Never any trouble during the day and evening it is very safe. Ladies now can come here without problems. There is a community atmosphere where you can chat. It is just good conversation, no TV, no radio music. In the 1960s and 70s, English pubs were like this (Interview with customer no. 1, The Hope, 2016).

A secondary, but no less relevant, effect of COPs has been the rapid growth of properties' value in the surrounding areas. What happened is common to all the cases: the previous management did not take care of service quality, and this choice brought “dangerous people” into the pubs, and a consequent bad reputation.

Before 2009, the pub, for five years, degenerated. It was not a very nice pub. [...] The pub ran on a very low level by Punch Tavern that had no interest in the quality of the service (Interview with the licensee, The Hope, 2016).

In just one year, all managers witnessed a rise in property prices around the pubs, confirmed by local real estate agents; this was because of the quality that the pubs have brought to their neighbourhoods; pubs' members have recognized this as a sign of their good work in communities.

This area had a bad reputation and I think this pub is an attraction for people from other areas. A good local pub is very attractive (Interview with director no. 2, The Ivy House, 2016).

The value of the properties near the pub have been grown by £25,000 from the opening, as confirmed by a local real estate agency. (Interview with the licensee, The Hope, 2016).

All managers confirm the success of these businesses; it is important to point out how the re-establishment of COPs has regenerated these venues not only in the physical aspect but also in their ability to attract locals. The customer non-members interviewed recognize the great value in these places, and agree in saying that these pubs express a real sense of community.

7. Discussion

The report on the three case studies provides useful insights into how the COPs work in urban contexts and the role of social capital in their functioning processes. First, these projects have preserved historic pubs from demolition, safeguarding local tradition and culture. All cases present the same situation: the pub companies that owned the buildings decided to convert them because previous managements had earned low profits. The pubs

were experienced by people in a negative way, and they were perceived as unfriendly places. All three pubs have a strong historical heritage; indeed, they were founded in the nineteenth century, and communities recognize them as traditional places. Furthermore, the three groups of promoters expressed the same motivations to convince citizens to join in the campaigns: to save a historic place, opposition against new buildings and the possibility to promote a project for the general interest of the community. Therefore, by enlarging participation through the bridging social capital, the initiatives have developed a wider sense of local community members belonging in the COPs: people feel a commitment towards pubs and the projects' success virtuously reinforces their participation as a social capital outcome (Putnam, 2000).

Secondly, these pubs are truly bottom-up experiences; the founders are all community members, and they involve other subjects from the same area. In the beginning, they involved those who could immediately provide support to the project (friends, relatives and former customers); by having a direct relation, reciprocal knowledge and trust, founders could rely on the support of these people. Then, the necessity for greater support and the desire to engage the widest share of the local population led the group to expand the project. Furthermore, these initiatives have mobilized people to take action against the reconversion of pubs, which was perceived as a top-down decision and not in the community's interest. The participation of shareholders, the commitment to community values, and different actors' engagement have led to a significant improvement of these businesses. Indeed, The Ivy House and The Antwerp Arms adopted the "Right to bid" as a tool to express the local community's intentions towards the pubs. The Hope did not use this option, because it was founded in 2010 and the Localism Act was created in 2011. These initiatives are lived by people as an innovative way to be an active part of their neighbourhoods, because they can improve the sense of community.

The original aim was to stop the building of flats. [...] It is a meeting place, primarily social. If you live here, you come here and the customers are your neighbours. If you do not have a pub like this, you do not know your neighbourhood (Interview with director no. 3, The Ivy House, 2016).

I think we are part of the community, we influence it, we can listen to it and we can participate in it. It is good for this zone to have a good pub, it attracts people, and it is an asset (Interview with director no. 2, The Antwerp Arms, 2016).

Thirdly, pubs have a value as social collective-owned venues and places where people socialize; these elements reinforce the benefits deriving from bridging social capital, such as more social connections and trust in new social relations. Indeed, most interviewees revealed that their first aim was to be shareholders of the pub, rather than participants. As many interviewees expressed, the motivation for their investment was not a return on it. This is the basis for people's involvement: the possibility to share a place as their own, promote activities for communities and save a local historic place. Furthermore, this enhanced the sense of community in huge urban settings, such as the three London boroughs where the COPs are located. The different approaches of the COPs promote a return to the spirit of traditional pubs: as expressed by the mass observation group, users are "participators rather than spectators" (Mass Observation, 1943, p. 17); but this newer form has created stronger ties between locals and pubs.

People are proud to come here with relatives and friends and say, "I want to show you my pub" (Interview with shareholder no. 3, The Ivy House, 2016).

During the interviews, specific questions were done on the quality and quantity of social relationships. As explained above, the aim of this research is to investigate if these projects for community engagement have led to an increase of social capital. Table III presents the

Fostering
social capital

Main questions	No	Few	Enough	A lot	Do not know
Do you know more people after the experience of this project?	0	1	1	13	0
Do you trust in other members?	0	0	4	11	0
Has your trust in other members increased from the beginnings to nowadays?	1	1	7	5	1
Has the community pub contributed to increase the trust between locals?	0	0	4	10	1
Has the community pub contributed to increase the social relationships between locals?	0	1	0	14	0
Are new projects for the community possible after this experience?	0	1	4	9	1
Do members have an interest in the management of the pub?	0	1	6	8	0
Do members have an active part in the activities of the pub?	0	1	8	6	0
Has the pub increased the involvement of local people in their community?	0	1	2	12	0
<i>What is your level of trust in these institutions</i>					
National government	5	5	5	0	0
Local government	1	8	5	1	0
Religion institutions	5	3	0	0	0
Professional associations	1	3	6	4	1
Charities or voluntary groups	0	2	5	7	1
What is the level of interest from the community related to the community pub?	0	1	2	12	0

Table III.
Responses to the
structured
questionnaire

results of this structured section. In this case, only the managers, directors and shareholders responded to the questions; this is because of these subjects' higher level of involvement.

The multitude of people involved is the key element that forms the basis of the pubs' ability to understand local needs and develop new projects. The strategic partnership with other organizations, the "open door" approach of the boards and the social capital of each director, create social networks that enable the COPs to have a wider view of their context.

Table III also shows another important element. The general trend regarding trust in different institutions reveals a disaffection with national and local governments and religious institutions. On the other hand, trust in charities and voluntary groups is higher. This point presents an interesting situation because there is a wide gap between citizens and governments of every level. What emerges from this study is the possibility to be more effective in building social capital at the local level, through a local organization rather than a political action (Stolle and Rochon, 1998; Hooghe and Stolle, 2003; Degli Antoni and Portale, 2011; Borzaga and Sforzi, 2015).

The three projects follow different paths. From a solid group of founders, which express the initial bonding capital necessary for generating the COP idea, the projects expand the attention paid to these venues; they gather people and resources for improving the pubs when they are reopened and reconverted into COPs. Founders find new possibilities and insights from new participants, and those involved witness an enhancement of their social relations, trust in others and inclination for collaboration. These results demonstrate how bonding social capital, through adequate use, can create new organizations for the improvement of local services and the betterment of social aggregation.

Despite these main results, which point out the COPs' ability to contribute to increasing social capital within their communities, the main criticism has emerged during the fieldwork: many interviews point out the impact of the pubs on the surrounding context,

particularly regarding the price of houses. This could be considered as a negative externality of these projects because the rising prices can drive local citizens to leave their homes, and trigger processes of gentrification in the neighbourhoods. The analysis of community projects must always also consider these effects because the increase of life quality in a place can produce unexpected consequences.

8. Conclusion

This study has analysed three COPs in three different London boroughs; each pub has its own specificities and characteristics. This has been done by considering the relationship between COPs, as an innovative type of organization, and social capital in its two dimensions, namely, bonding and bridging social capital. The main results point out that this new organization model (COP) is able to increase social interaction and civic engagement, and it strengthens local communities by providing an accumulation of social capital within the local community.

The common process appears to be as follows: after the pub closure, a few people devise the idea to promote a community development project; thus, they become leaders of this process. They take advantage of bonding social capital, through which they find other locals willing to save the pub; this creates the promoters' group. Then, to raise money, promoters use their strong ties to find reliable people who trust them, and will, therefore, believe in the goodness of the COP project. Alongside this, promoters start campaigning to raise awareness and funds for the pub's reopening; they strengthen the weak ties around their groups.

The results of the three empirical case studies show that the collective and social foundations of COPs lie in the social structure of the local communities in which they are embedded. Because of this "embeddedness" and to the services provided, the COPs are able to positively contribute to the well-being not only of their members but also of the broader communities. The main enabling factors for developing COPs are:

- the cultural resources (e.g. pubs are a part of the British culture) and a promoting group (bonding social capital);
- participatory and dynamic governance (anyone can join the COP); and
- the services are provided in the interest of the community (e.g. regular meet-up groups, hub services) (bridging social capital).

In addition, these case studies point out the relevance of social capital on two different levels, micro- and meso-level. At the micro-level, it is possible to see the relevance of bonding social capital in the start-up phase of the process, where the founders of COPs share a specific "domain" (i.e. saving the pub) linked to a specific "practice" (COPs), thus activating their strong social network for the projects' realization. At the meso-level, the case studies show how founders' intentions led them to activate bridging social capital in their communities, to increase attention towards the "domain" and to build a "sense of belonging", trust and collaboration within the community, and to raise funds for the projects. Both strong ties (friends) and weak ties (neighbours) were used as a means of fundraising, collective action and community involvement.

While bonding social capital has been useful for the first step (generating and launching the idea), the adoption of a specific organizational model and collective governance (i.e. CBEs) has been crucial for the following community engagement, and for increasing the frequency and proximity of informal interaction among local actors (bridging social capital). COPs, because of their structure and the services provided, are able to bring together both bonding and bridging social capital, thus encouraging trust, creating new linkages among different people, and enabling locals to act together for the common good in urban settings.

This study points out that when individuals deal collectively with social and economic problems, they are able to organize themselves, to invest their resources and time, and create new networks, to accomplish an entrepreneurial activity and to find their own solutions (Peredo and Chrisman, 2006). Even if the literature suggests that networks and social bonds in urban neighbourhoods risk losing their relevance (Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999; Wellman, 2001), a different organizational model such as COPs shows that it is possible to positively contribute to building social capital and strengthening social cohesion in urban neighbourhoods.

Other future research directions could be considered, e.g. possibilities of a larger sample or a deeper investigation of the correlation between low-income classes and participants in COPs projects.

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Further reading

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