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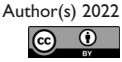

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The Preston Model: Economic Democracy, Cooperation, and Paradoxes in Organisational and Social Identification

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Abstract

The 'Preston Model' (PM) has substantially improved the socio-economic outlook of Preston (UK). It is a community wealth-building approach, harnessing local economic power for a more resilient, environmentally sustainable, democratic economy and socially cohesive community, prioritising social value, through private and public sector partnerships. This qualitative research article investigates how people in local 'anchor institutions' (major wealth creators and employers 'anchored' in Preston) perceive the PM. Focusing on economic democracy and solidarity, and building on organisational and social identity theory, its relation with democratic participation, organisational identification and pride processes enabling social change is examined. Most interviewees doubt its organisational and local impact; nevertheless, they exhibit a sense of pride as its 'drivers', attributing to it 'higher' ethical values. While the PM exerts a subtle emotional, aspirational, and socio-cultural influence, it still represents a shifting, alternative socio-economic paradigm, emerging through both individual and collective assent, rather than specific policy directives.

Keywords

cooperatives, cooperation, economic democracy, organisational identification, Preston Model, pride, social change, social identity, social value, solidarity

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Introduction and background context

The recent economic and health crises have stimulated much interest in alternative systems of socio-economic organisation. Work organisations' roles within the public and private spheres, the interplay between the individual and the social, democracy aspects and the market economy are being questioned, while the necessity, type, and priorities of economic growth are strongly re-examined (Novkovic and Webb, 2014; Raworth, 2018; Trebeck and Williams, 2019), and the search for alternative models to the existing capitalist system is growing (Manley and Aiken, 2020). This article regards the 'Preston Model' (PM) as a case study example of an attempt to challenge the socio-economic status quo and transform the socio-economic fabric of the city of Preston in the north-west of England (Manley and Whyman, 2021). Inspired by the democratic principles of cooperativism, the PM is often described as a form of community wealth building (CWB), or new municipalism (Gilbert, 2020), where local wealth, especially that of anchor institutions, is generated and retained in the city, and participatory democracy is encouraged through adherence to cooperative values, emphasising social value and economic democracy before profit. In investigating whether the PM can become a model for such change in other similar cities in the UK and beyond, we suggest that attention to social value and democracy is as important as economically driven change and that in a post-growth society, the former may begin to supersede the latter.

The 2008 financial crisis, followed by a collapse of inward investment in 2011 accompanied by the wave of public spending cuts for UK local councils, was a 'pause in discourse' for Preston, altering people's understanding of themselves, the role of their workplace in a wider social collective, as well as their conception of the market economy, its broader purpose, and goals. UK local councils have suffered unprecedented cuts in government funding and a progressive deterioration of power and authority since then. These cuts have sparked the imagination that created the PM (Chakrabortty, 2018). Governments and financial elites responded to the crisis by restoring the conditions of 'business as usual', while the economic, social, and human damage inflicted remained mostly untouched. This gave rise to a more explicit critique of economic systems through 'transition movements' and alternative, place-based initiatives such as a new municipalism and CWB (Agustín, 2020).

For Guinan and O'Neill (2019), 'community wealth-building is a local economic development strategy building collaborative, inclusive, sustainable and democratically controlled local economies . . . [and includes] worker cooperatives, community land trusts, community development financial institutions, so-called "anchor"' procurement strategies, municipal and local public enterprise, and – as it is hoped will increasingly become the case – public and community banking. This conceptualisation broadly describes 'the brand' of CWB applied in Preston.

This search for alternatives to the dominant capitalist neoliberal paradigm is not new. Critical sociologists highlighted that neoliberalism has transformed into a set of political imperatives and a socio-cultural logic, where free market operation guides all human thought and activity (Harvey, 2005). Nevertheless, imagination is the capacity to envision 'things to come', something beyond and other than what is already instituted (Castoriadis, 1987; Putnam, 2001). We argue that it is in this realm of imagination,

future expectations and belief in change that CWB initiatives aiming at alternative, more place-based, democratic and cooperative economies such as the PM are situated. Dinerstein (2014: 2) conceptualises this as 'the delineation of new horizons beyond the given truth' and that 'hope movements confront the state and capital, challenge existing matrices of power and socio-political horizons, fill spaces and/or render alternative forms of cooperative and dignified work, democracy, land, indigenous autonomy, education, relation with nature and politics'. Gibson-Graham (1996) has further argued that the hegemony of capitalism can be deconstructed by a language of economic difference (a politics of language), cultivating subjects who desire and inhabit non-capitalist economic spaces (a politics of the subject), and building community economies; a politics of collective action. Our analysis indicates that most of the participants do not consider the various PM initiatives as radical or specifically anti-capitalist movement, but rather perceive the local socio-economic changes as being situated within the current free market context, even though this is the free market as interpreted by a tendency to progressive, rather than market fundamentalist views. As an example of the former, they emphasise the transition from purely financial concerns, to care and attention to community, democracy, equitable worker treatment, cooperation, resilience and environmental sustainability.

Moreover, Castells (2014: 153) talks about 'alternative constructions of the meaning of life', introducing considerations of individual fulfilment and happiness where dominant economic paradigms are challenged on their impact on individual and collective wellbeing. Like the PM, alternative economies start small, focusing on areas free markets leave out, incorporating the excluded and unemployed, re-establishing environmental diversity, and maintaining sustainable economic practices that might, in the short term, reduce monetary gain, but allow for social cohesion, cooperation, and democracy to grow (Castells, 2014). Thus, they enable more participatory, emancipatory, democratic, cooperative, and community-oriented economic practices (Bretos and Errasti, 2017). In that sense, the PM carries with it the potential for new social imaginaries and subjectivities to emerge (Castoriadis, 1987).

Research context

The article draws from initial findings of ongoing research on the PM, focusing on respondents from the anchor institutions, which form the bulk of our sample. There is substantial evidence of the model influencing our respondents' overall attitudes towards social and democratic change through examples of locally strong organisational identification, supported by a stimulation of organisational, social, and local civic pride. The analysis builds on previous research on the role of affect in developing societies of cooperation (Manley and Aiken, 2020; Manley, 2021), locating the value of affect in the PM in a sense of pride understood as a source of organisational and social identity. The evidence demonstrates how through its transformative goals, cooperative values, and ideas of alternative models of democratic participation and socio-economic organisation the PM gently influences the perceptions and alters the mindsets of our interviewees in Preston; how, by merit of informal and formal networks of cooperation, the individual's

sense of what is worthwhile beyond individual gain and financial advancement within the work organisation can be made more open towards ideas of collective and democratic transformation that give meaning to citizenship and pride of place. By facilitating new socio-economic relationships and significantly enhancing processes of organisational identification based on the participants' individually perceived associations with the PM and their organisations' roles as collectives in its development, the first steps towards a different perception of economic democracy can be seen in the PM, as suggested by Cumbers et al. (2020).

This article further investigates Cumbers et al.'s (2020: 684) premise that individual rights of self-government and the rights of the collective demand equal attention, arguing that a transformative economic democracy will need both, and that it is only through reaffirming the 'centrality of individual rights' that collective rights of participation are enacted, amalgamating both the collective and the individual. The PM, as a case study, illustrates what the re-evaluation of economic democracy, as theorised in Cumbers et al., looks like in a contemporary example. In addition, we examine the link between economic democracy and solidarity, as discussed in the 2020 *Work*, *Employment and Society* Special Issue on solidarity as a counter to political upheaval in what the editors call 'an age of extremes' (Beck and Brook, 2020). It is argued there that a sense of economic democracy is enhanced through organisational and social identification, with the nexus between the individual and the collective encapsulated in the idea of 'solidarity'. The conceptualisation of economic democracy in terms of solidarity is an important aspect of a socio-economic system with cooperative principles as a form of democratic governance, as described in the work of Dufays et al. (2020).

In the Preston case study, the solidarity within social movements and how this might be promoted through a general take on 'cooperation' as opposed to 'competition' are examined. The question is posed, to what extent is an emergent economic democracy in Preston the result of a social movement of cooperation, even if it is based on values and principles rather than formal cooperatives. Where Dufays et al. (2020: 973) are focused on the worker-owned cooperative as a form of governance at work '. . . much like new social movements, a co-operative brings together persons who share the same needs', this article argues that such needs can be shared in a macro-economic project that includes attention to cooperative values for ordinary businesses and organisations, cooperative or not, bound together by solidarity leading to enhanced economic democracy.

This article discusses 'economic democracy' as a socio-economic arrangement where local economic institutions are influenced by democratic principles as exemplified by cooperation, place, and community. Not rejecting the role of markets, but rather de-emphasising the profit's primacy with economic decision makers (Iuviene et al., 2010). Shared ownership of the local economy can enable control of one's labour and embed economic decision-making within the democratic public realm, with local communities participating in rooting their wealth and keeping resources from 'leaking out' of the area (Coraggio and Arroyo, 2009). Thus, the PM idea combining cooperative business and/or cooperative values and principles with public institutions speaks to this model of economic democracy (Whyte and Whyte, 2014).

The PM: background

In 2011, following the 2008 financial crisis, a large £700m private investment and regeneration scheme for Preston collapsed, signalling the failure of a system of standard capitalist inward investment-return design, and a turn towards participation and cooperation for the common good. This prompted Preston City Council (PCC), inspired by the 'Cleveland Model' in the US and the 'Mondragón experience' in the Basque Country, to experiment with a strategy focused on local growth, a democratic economy, social impact, cooperation, and social cohesion to revitalise the city (Howard et al., 2010; Prinos, 2021). The PM started by favouring local suppliers in the procurement strategies of local anchor institutions (PCC, Lancashire County Council, Community Gateway Association, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), Preston's College, Lancashire Constabulary, and the local National Health Service Hospital). It went on to include a range of progressive policies for social transformation, including the creation of a development network for cooperatives (the Preston Cooperative Development Network), a regional Community and Cooperative Bank, and a Cooperative Education Centre. The goal is to make financial power work for local places through democratic transformation, using existing economic wealth; infusing economic growth with social value; creating quality employment and fair labour markets; enhancing local procurement and the socially productive use of land and property; and facilitating community access to local public assets with tangible benefits for citizens, communities, organisations, and businesses (CLES, 2017, 2019).

In this article, social value is not a measurement to demonstrate the community impact of projects using terms such 'added social value' (Mulgan, 2010). Rather, it is more related to the creation of social capital through community engagement and place-based as well as organisational identification processes. In their study of social housing and partnerships between local authorities and housing associations in the UK which featured increased tenant participation in decision-making, Lambourne and Jenkins (2020), identified the forging and embedding of social values, tenant empowerment, sustainment of community identity, enhanced tenant wellbeing, and strong organisational identification exhibited by the local council and housing association employees. Consequently, these participatory initiatives devolving power to the community resulted – apart from the improvement of housing conditions – in the creation of social value nested in these more 'intangible spaces' of identity, cooperation, feelings of public service, and greater community engagement. Donati's research (2013) on social capital and public goods also demonstrated how different public goods may be produced and/or enhanced depending on the social value of the social relations that constitute them. Similarly, Caldwell et al. (2017) showed that in hybrid public–private collaborations, social value is created with mutual knowledge and goal alignment leading to relational coordination. Those insights resonate strongly with the PM, being primarily driven not by formal, political mandates or strict economic planning, but by the social value of organically developing informal social relations, enabling the emergence and alignment of positive emotions, mindsets, and attitudes related to pride, place, identity, and the participation in this alternative socio-economic initiative, for the 'greater good' of the local community.

The PM is partly inspired by the Mondragón cooperatives, now part of a €12 billion umbrella corporation with over 110 worker-owned cooperatives and numerous subsidiaries and benefit societies, distributed across various industries (Thomas and Logan, 2017). Democratic practices are entrenched in the system, with the 'one person, one vote' rule guiding all key decisions and the workers' general assembly of every cooperative being the sole body appointing the Governing and Social Councils forming the core of Mondragón governance structures (Heales et al., 2017). The PM is embracing these influences to create a hybrid model for the future of Preston.

So far, the PM has produced impressive economic results. Repeated analysis of anchor institution spending from 2013 to 2018 indicates that spend in the Preston economy increased from £38m to £111m. By 2016/2017, out of £620m spent on goods and services by local anchor institutions, 19% was spent in Preston and 81% in Lancashire as a whole. This compares with 5% and 39% in 2013, respectively. Unemployment was reduced from 6.5% in 2014 to 3.1% in 2017 (compared to UK average of 4.6% in 2017), Preston was named 'Most Improved City in the UK' in 2018 and rose from 143rd to 130th in the Social Mobility Commission Index (out of 324 local authority areas), moving out of the 20% most deprived local authority areas in the UK (Demos-PwC, 2018). A full economic analysis of the PM can be found in the work of Whyman (2021). In this article, we focus on the social identification and democratic aspects of the model accompanying this economic success.

Identification, social identification, and economic democracy

Workers' understandings of their identity in their workplace and their perception of its identity are constantly re-interpreted, but occasionally, the cycle is interrupted by a 'crisis or pause in discourse' (Ozarow and Croucher, 2014). For example, Monteagudo (2008) argues that the 2001–2002 crisis in Argentina was so profound that citizens and workers re-evaluated their roles in society and the workplace; similarly for Greece, especially after 2010 (Kokkinidis, 2014). Coraggio and Arroyo (2009) also found that subjectivities were altered and work became synonymous with the re-discovery of self-identity and the recovery of dignity, self-esteem, and self-realisation. For worker-owned cooperatives, the sense of identity is a collective one of worker members together agreeing to work towards common value principles. Hence, as Dufays et al. (2020: 974) point out, 'workers joining a co-operative are likely to endorse a certain identity that defines them both socially and collectively'.

In organisational literature, 'identification' is traditionally related to attitudes of employees towards their organisation (Van Dick, 2001). Tompkins and Cheney (1983: 144) defined organisational identification more broadly than just a focus on emotional ties with other persons, occurring 'when, in making a decision, the person in one or more of his or her organisational roles perceives that unit's values or interests as relevant in evaluating the alternatives of choice'. In this article, organisational identification consists of feelings of loyalty, pride, belonging, and attachment, leading to the support of an organisation's goals and a sense of shared values and aims (Cheney,

1982). We are arguing that this type of organisational identification can be applied to anchor institutions' employees as organisations in synergy with the city and Preston communities, re-conceptualised as the PM. For the PM, this is equivalent to reconfiguring economic democracy, where the workplace as a micro-economy is intertwined with the macro-economic arena that, in turn, is politically interweaved with the workplace through the actions of PCC.

According to social identity theory, social identity is 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel and Turner, 1986: 63) and has three dimensions: (1) a cognitive component (the knowledge of being a member of a certain group); (2) an affective element (the emotional attachment to that group); and (3) an evaluative aspect (the value connotation assigned to that group from outside). These components are remarkably enhanced in our respondents' perceptions. Social identity theory adds to a sociological perspective its interpretation of social movement and change, as demonstrated in the PM, which emphasises the hard to quantify but vitally important, affective aspect attached to CWB. We argue that without this psychologically informed approach, the social changes that form part of the PM cannot be fully understood. In an organisational context, a work group may represent social categories that individuals can identify with, resulting in a self-image of workers shaped by perceived shared values with the organisation and the desire for affiliation (Hogg and Terry, 2000). This self-image may reside in an individual, but will resonate with the framework of the group, organisation, or even the wider 'group', such as, in our study, the feeling of being 'a Prestonian' and the proud 'carrier of PM values'. This is an attitudinal effect that has been described as a 'category prototype – a fuzzy set of attributes that are meaningfully inter-related' (Hogg and Smith, 2007: 94). 'Fuzzy' (but not less important) certainly describes the hard-to-grasp aspect of pride and belonging, an essential PM component.

Research design and methodology

The primary methodological tool that was employed was the semi-structured, responsive, in-depth qualitative interview, for the exploration of attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives shaping everyday practices (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). These interviews combined a series of similar questions for each interview, with a responsive approach to possibilities arising from the interviewee, whenever we felt that further affect could be explored by allowing for elements of free associative thinking, as described by Hollway and Jefferson (2008). By including open-ended questions, the interviewer allowed a free-flowing discussion avoiding 'leading' during the interview and allowing respondents to explore the subjects in their own words and from many angles. Thus, apart from designated themes, questions often emerged organically and participants could elaborate on anything of significance to them (Neuman, 2011).

The participants are mostly people working and/or living in Preston, holding professional roles in different anchor institutions. Interviewees were recruited directly by the research team, and purposeful sampling was utilised early in the project to identify potential candidates from (mostly) the anchor institutions forming the bulk of the sample

and having various levels of involvement and knowledge of PM-related local developments. Later on, a 'snowballing' sampling approach was increasingly used, as respondents introduced the researchers to other participants (usually) from their organisations who would have useful information. In total, 77 participant interviews were conducted. For the analysis, a 'thematic analysis' approach was utilised, abstracting from the data and constructing the most salient for the research purposes main themes (categories) and sub-themes. These were coded, grouped, associated, and compared, in search for patterns of similarity or variation, which could lead to interpretive conclusions and theoretical extrapolations. UCLan's Research Ethics committee approved the research (Approval Reference No.: PSYSOC 498), and all data have been fully anonymised.

Findings, analysis, and discussion

Our findings indicated a cautious, nuanced and occasionally paradoxical response to the PM. For example, it was not necessarily clear to our respondents whether there had been tangible, demonstrable change in Preston, but neither were they dismissive of the PM or its principles and values. We hypothesise that this ambiguity may be caused by respondents identifying strongly with their organisations as important stakeholders and often suggesting that the PM principles had already been pursued by their organisations long before the PM acquired its recent fame. Consequently, the participants, mostly working in Preston anchors, regardless of their level of involvement with the model, perceived it as a mixed bag, containing abundant contradictions. Overall, doubts were expressed about visible PM improvements, with one respondent doubting asking 'have the most vulnerable members of our communities seen any improvement in their lives?' and another remarking that 'the high street after 6 pm in the winter is still a very rough place, isn't it?'. Another makes an ideological observation questioning how increased wealth is distributed; '. . . the less affluent areas in Preston remain so; people don't have better housing now or that their social services have markedly improved, so I'm not sure; yes, wealth has been generated, but how has it been distributed?'. These are framed as questions, reflecting, perhaps, a desire to engage with the issues as opposed to making radical statements in favour or against.

This tone of openness and engagement characterises respondent feedback throughout the study. It may be that the local focus (apparent in the name itself) allows locals to proudly identify with it, leading to positive identification with the PM that encourages such an openness, a feeling that it might be possible to answer questions in the air, even though these questions have to be posed. Also, we encountered a localness as a counter to a London-centred focus (a common view of English economic division between north and south, but this time with a positive spin on Preston): '. . . it didn't come down from London and it's made by people in Preston for people in Preston'. For another participant, the local aspect of the PM was the single most important feature: 'I think that the biggest difference is that the PM is local; developed by local people for the local community, fostering cooperation between local organisations and businesses', while another implied that local means authentic action as opposed to the empty promises from elsewhere: '. . . it's local and not just promises or intentions; it's a set of interventions of

great social value, like paying the living wage and being environmentally responsible as a Council or a business'. This latter respondent even overstates PM's achievements, by referring to its 'being environmentally responsible', which is as yet only an implied aspect of the PM. This demonstrates the power of the *idea* of the PM, its affective power to re-motivate stakeholders towards movement and reconstruction based on dreams, and desired social identification. This is the stuff of motivating dreams, pointing to the function of aspirations that are not current facts, which we have discussed elsewhere (Manley and Aiken, 2020).

Since the idea and the reality play off against each other, our respondents simultaneously accept and deny the presence of the PM, both in the vague 'reality' of the present and in a desired projection into an imagined future:

> I'm not sure really. The PM isn't a rigid policy, it's more of a mindset, a force and an inspiration: how can we add social value to public contracts? How can we upskill the local workforce? How can we co-operate with other organisations and be environmentally sustainable? It's this dialogue that the PM has created, making these interventions possible.

For this respondent, the PM is an 'inspiration' changing the 'mindset' and enabling asking the right questions (again, the 'PM vision' is framed as a series of questions). This perception indicates the creation of a forum for thoughts and ideas, possibly the beginnings of a space of participatory democracy, one of the underlying aims of the PM. As opposed to the failed 2011 top-down investment project, the PM has enabled the possibility of democratic participation, asking the questions that make sense in the local context, a bottom-up approach. This sense of participation is also visible in the following another respondent's comment, where the anchor is becoming a 'partner' and 'player' in the 'holistic' fabric of Preston, through a team 'playing' together, increasing cooperation among actors:

> No changes, but recently we are doing better in making our presence felt in the area, establishing ourselves as a 'player'. We are consulted and engage more as a partner with the other anchors and local authorities, looking at things in a more holistic way.

Another participant suggests that taking risks has become more acceptable to the anchor institution, which we might similarly speculate comes from the sense of being 'players' in a team, where risk is mitigated by a sense of solidarity and the need for each member of the 'team' to be supportive: '. . . colleagues are more willing to be "riskier" now in seeking local partnerships for service delivery'. In these questions and a 'holistic' approach, we suggest that it is the very affective nature of social identification with the PM that challenges the hard, targeted, and outcome-driven position of many urban regeneration schemes. Local procurement has become a 'self-serving goal' as opposed to responding directly to economic imperatives: '. . . but now there is the prioritisation of local procurement which we apply when possible'. This respondent further refers to other anchors as partners and team players for the common good: '. . . and a dialogue with other anchor partners for engaging more effectively with our businesses and

communities . . .'. This spirit is nicely summed up by another respondent describing the change from economic to social identification and the development of social drivers:

> . . . we focus more on local companies adding social and environmental criteria on big development public contracts. The PM has certainly helped in making social value more like a common practice, without neglecting economic viability.

So, while participants deny any specific organisational changes in their own institutions, they talk about changes in organisational practices of other Preston anchors more broadly, hinting at wider processes of democratic social change, symbolised by the 'city' and facilitated by PM-related ideas and activities. One remarks that they '. . . feel the PM is a great initiative for the city; it's fantastic we support this cultural and educational change through the anchor institutions, sharing good practice for our community', while another states that '. . . we can be more involved in city projects now; more aware of our social responsibility and engaged with our community and other Preston organisations; there's a better atmosphere for that'. They highlight more opportunities for city partnerships and a noticeable, increased willingness of colleagues and organisations, to consider greater cooperation, paying more attention to social responsibility and leveraging social value, both in their business strategies and in their approaches to community engagement, exhibiting a sentiment of satisfaction for their organisational affiliation and their organisations' involvement in the PM. This identification is accompanied by a sense of innovation: '. . . with the publicity of the PM, there's a better environment for this approach', and a sense of future change: '. . . there's an improvement in the collaborations happening in Preston now. We are proud to be a part of this; I'd like us to do more'.

There is tacit solidarity in these responses interpreting the PM as a binding agent for the commons, but a reluctance to see this innovation as being primarily located in it. As one respondent states, '. . . we've always been very cognisant of our role to provide learning and employment and with the PM, we are looking even more to that'. Another similarly responds, 'I feel we've always looked at social value; how to share good practice. The PM didn't introduce those but maybe has raised their visibility; made them predominant'. On the one hand, the anchor institutions appear more willing to try novel economic ideas or share 'best practice',; engage with the community, create a more just labour market, upskill the local workforce, promote democratic ownership and governance in the local economy, and embark in partnerships in Preston. On the other hand, respondents claim not to have actually noticed any significant, tangible changes in their organisations.

The tussle between PM's aspirations and what the original aspirations of each anchor were is also mirrored in a tendency to waver between the 'dream' of the PM as a better, 'cooperative future' and the 'harsh reality' which cannot be ignored, as noted in the following comments from two respondents: '. . . without this new focus [the PM] meaning that we throw any cost–benefit analyses and money-saving options out of the window in our operation' and '. . . if an outside private investor comes to us and wants to do 'big business' in Preston creating wealth and employment, we aren't going to say, 'look, we'll not discuss your project because we are only doing the PM here'; we are not daft. But we

will look closely on its impact on our community, the environment, the quality of local employment and our social economy'.

Thus, the PM, on some level, influences changes in the participants' mindsets and subsequently contributes to a nuanced cultural change in their workplaces. It appears that there is an organisational change in the anchor institutions as partners involved with the PM, but mainly on this rather abstract level of awareness. Respondents understand their organisation as participating in a movement of sorts, pursuing a distinctive economic logic and also continuing to operate in a free market environment. So, for most participants, the PM is not a radical political endeavour aspiring to overturn free market practices, but rather a subtle shift towards 'reconfiguring' them into a more socially just, environmentally sustainable, and community-oriented socio-economic approach. This questions Guinan and O'Neill's (2019) interpretation of CWB as a politically driven Labour Party–led initiative (or at least points to an interest in the common good rather than any specific ideology) and hints at a possible tension between organisational necessities in a free market context and the desire to better serve local community needs.

Thus, the claim that anchor institutions had already been pursuing PM principles before the 'model' (therefore being contributors to its success) may be due to the presence of enhanced organisational identification combined with a sense of local pride at once stimulated by the PM and yet paradoxically denied. This type of 'hindsight' speaks volumes to the subtle, transformative powers of the PM's core ideas and initiatives, by 'latching on' these collective sentiments and the idea that striving for social innovation has always been central in the participants' understanding of who they are within their organisations, as well as within Preston.

Kim et al. (2010) suggest that employees' perceptions of their organisational involvement in the community relate to the perceived external prestige of their organisation, which in turn correlates with their level of organisational identification. They highlighted the mediating role of employees' perceptions of overall justice in the relationship between their perceptions of corporate social responsibility initiatives and their own identification, with perceived community service highlighting attractive and distinctive organisational attributes in employees' perceptions. These then foster 'membership pride' and willingness to identify with the organisation and, in our case, with PM initiatives in solidarity and democracy, according to the values that underpin the model.

Individual identity partly results from their collective or social identity (Tajfel, 1978). Therefore, individuals tend to affiliate themselves with social groups they consider prestigious, attractive, and distinctive, perceiving themselves (and their organisations) in a more positive light and thereby satisfying their fundamental need for self-esteem (Smidts et al., 2001). We suggest that the way individual and social identity interact in our example resonates with the joining of the individual and the collective in the work of Cumbers et al. (2020), in a newly configured vision of economic democracy. By viewing the employee as the individual citizen, and the work organisation as the microcosm of the social collective, combined in the PM by the solidarity of an emphasis given to social value as both individual and collective, the PM re-organises the framework of a neoliberal economics, from competition and profit-making, to a new economic democracy. This sense of individual and collective pride and belonging, first to the anchor institution

and then to the 'team' of anchor institutions and the city, creates the potential for the anchor institutions to become 'a team'; a democratic network as opposed to competing businesses.

This may explain the apparent disconnect between participants' assertions that nothing significant has changed and simultaneously that positive cultural changes take place locally, both in their institutions and in the social sphere. It is this pride and the aspiration of belonging to the collective called the 'Preston Model' that participants desire to identify with, re-envisioned as a democratic and cooperative Preston, and its subsequent personal internalisation, that urges individuals to declare that their organisations were already committed social actors in this 'new atmosphere' in Preston. As a result, an emotional feedback loop of organisational identification and pride is created, where the more the PM is given meaning by the respondents internalised as a hopeful, alternative narrative for a 'better Preston', the more they identify with their respective organisations as essential contributors to this discourse. Consequently, their self-perception is strongly affected by their identification with what is, in their eyes, a worthwhile effort with 'higher value connotations'.

Conclusion and limitations

This study has some limitations. First, fieldwork is still underway, and there are follow-up interviews to be performed that could slightly modify the presented insights. Second, the execution of the research design has been affected by COVID-19, preventing several face-to-face interviews and focus groups to take place as intended. This has interfered, to a small degree, with the interviewer's rapport with the interviewee. Third, we are aware of the possibility of 'greenwashing' in respondents' stated views about the PM. Greenwashing refers to concerns that similarly to social responsibility programmes, alternative, community-based economic approaches, might be used as public relations mechanisms for the involved institutions' 'brand', seemingly exhibiting enhanced environmental and social awareness (Aggarwal and Kadyan, 2014). However, in our view, the data do not point to any of the organisations involved with the PM, engaging in such practices. We acknowledge, nevertheless, that these processes are in their early stages and more research is needed to determine the presence of greenwashing. Finally, we also acknowledge that close examination of such concerns was not part of this study. We have tended to adopt the optimistic view that the local actors have no such intentions. In any case, we contend that these limitations do not significantly detract from the value of our conclusions.

The PM has gained publicity as an alternative socio-economic strategy instigated by PCC in partnership with locally 'anchored' organisations, to develop the local economy, focusing on local businesses and assets. While its initial success and characterisation as a 'Model' may have afforded it media exposure, this has also resulted in its being perceived as simply another economic regeneration policy. This article demonstrates that while there are elements of the PM found in other past and present CWB schemes, in truth, its transformative aspirations, and impact on the participating organisations, as well as Preston communities, go beyond a narrow economic toolkit. In particular, our

study demonstrates how the PM has generated a motivational sense of belonging and participation, translated into a feeling of an emerging economic democracy glued together by solidarity and social value. It is simultaneously particularly potent but not easily quantified or categorised, just as the authenticity of democratic participation and solidarity are powerful but hard to measure. It extends into the realms of civic culture, social relationships, emotions, self-identity, organisational identity, local pride and organisational change. As such, the PM is difficult to define. Even if it were possible to point out specific policies, (i.e. the local procurement strategy), it remains a rather shifting web of initiatives and ideas, rather than a well-structured set of policies.

What has happened in Preston recently is seemingly based on informal interactions and commitments; a facilitation of personal and collective, organisational and social relationships. In today's dominant capitalist culture, the PM has tapped onto forgotten elements of social relationships and human nature; a yearning for socio-economic change built on a more ethical, equitable foundation of social cohesion and based on a guiding principle of democracy and cooperation.

There is a subtle organisational change within local anchor institutions, translated into strategic decisions such as the local procurement focus and the attachment of social value and environmental criteria to large public development contracts, but a more profound change is happening on an emotional level, in relationships and minds. The PM is demonstrating how business-oriented executives, senior managers, and staff at all levels of organisational governance can alter their mindsets, incorporating social impact and justice concerns as a priority in their planning, without any immediate financial benefit to their organisations. It is this willingness of the respondents to 'think out of the box', outside of established ways of working spurred by the PM and related to organisational identity and pride, that we believe is of immense social value.

In this context, this study indicates that the PM has initiated enhanced processes of organisational identification, affecting anchor institutions' employees, strongly influencing their individual self-perception, and creating strong feelings of allegiance to the PM as a 'worthy cause' including the individual and the collective. The organisational and social identification of people and anchors with the PM resonates with identification theory: the cognitive component, the affective dimension, and the evaluative aspect. Participants knew enough about the PM to want to be part of it; felt deeply about its social and affective value; and they were aware of how the PM (and therefore themselves) could be positively viewed from outside Preston. In addition, these identification processes have a paradoxical nature. Despite being very supportive of the PM and its transformative potential, most participants denied any substantial changes in their organisations related to the PM.

There is a twist to this thesis. The interviewees contended their organisations had always prioritised social impact, social value, and local community concerns in their institutional strategies, claiming to have always been inspired by similar ideals. We surmise that this contradiction is related to a sense of organisational identification directly associated with a feeling of pride rooted in the PM and its value framework. The respondents were eager and proud to present themselves as being associated with these organisations, which, as anchor institutions, are partners in the development of the PM. As such,

they are ‘drivers’ of social change on both an organisational and a socio-cultural dimension. They identified strongly with PM values even when they did not recognise its practical consequences. Through such processes, they also identified more strongly with their organisations as ‘carriers’ of these ethical ideas while at the same time forming a positive self-image due to their perception of these organisations as prestigious institutions, invested in a ‘higher cause’, pursuing socially just goals and practices.

Therefore, and crucially for organisational research, it is not managerial or political directives, profound changes in governance structures, or policy outlines imposed ‘from above’ that are comprising the PM. Instead, we are witnessing slow, subtle, but potentially radical organisation and social change based on relational aspirations, hopes, and desires. For sociological research, the key finding is that economic democracy and solidarity can come about organically through the PM. Through informal discussions and social relationships between individuals in different organisations examining more fervently than ever before the merits of cooperation, democratic governance, multilevel partnerships, community participation, and the meaning of social value, the PM can realise its potential both as a novel economic initiative and as a ‘vessel’ for a movement for future social change. It is an inspirational tale of how a complex initiative such as the PM can deeply affect individual organisational identity and generate socio-cultural change within disparate organisations and more broadly a local community, through the sharing of knowledge and good practice.

The present study reveals that the merits of alternative models of democratic economic development based on ideas of community, social justice and cooperation may reside in enabling people to question the dogmatic power of commonly accepted market-driven paradigms of socio-economic organisation. Perhaps, this pro-active and, to some extent, unformed approach for exploring such alternative paradigms that the PM articulates may find a solid footing in social processes that embrace democracy, solidarity, and organisational and social identification, all conditioned by a sense of overarching pride. These processes appear to be sparked from the innate tendencies of many people to be drawn towards concepts such as social value and community impact and be members of organisations characterised by such principles, of wanting to have that sense of belonging to organisations that are working towards ‘ethical change’ and the pursuit of ‘ethical goals’, for which they can strive through social relationships developed organically at work, guided by values of democratic cooperation, and a deep sense of satisfaction that comes with being fellow passengers in such a journey.

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