

Resisting the tide: the roles of ideology in sustaining alternative organizing

at a self-managed cooperative

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Introduction

Over the last decades, there has been increasing scholarly attention to alternative forms of organising that distinguish themselves from the dominant shareholder-owned corporate model (Parker et al., 2014; Tedmanson et al., 2015). Self-managed organisations, for example, are an emblematic type of alternative organisation (Atzeni, 2012) that rejects hierarchy and shareholder control by providing ownership and decision-making rights to the workers (Luhman, 2006). However, sustaining fundamentally distinctive practices over time is difficult because they contrast with, and resist, dominant institutional prescriptions (Dufays et al., 2020; Fleming, 2016). For example, in the case of self-management, socially expected norms and practices concerning hierarchy, specialisation of roles and tasks, and commensurate salaries and working conditions, are conveyed by public authorities, the educational system, the media, and often workers themselves (Battilana et al., 2018; Pansera & Rizzi, 2020; Vieta, 2020). In this paper, we explore how an alternative organisational form such as self-management can be sustained over time as a form of ‘institutional resistance’ to hostile pressures.

More particularly, we focus on the under-explored role of ideology in this process. Indeed, the literature on alternative organisational forms has mainly focused on the use of given practices

to sustain distinctiveness over time and avoid ‘degeneration’ (Pek, 2021), i.e. the erosion of the distinctive organisational practices in favour of conformity with the dominant model (Dufays et al., 2020; Tedmanson et al., 2015). For example, scholars have shown that degeneration can be attenuated or even avoided through establishing shared leadership, implementing job rotation, restricting size and growth, or building strong support networks (Cornforth, 1995; Jaumier, 2017; Kokkinidis, 2015b; Pansera & Rizzi, 2020; Sutherland et al., 2014). While insightful, these studies tend to neglect the ideological drivers underlying these practices. This is surprising because self-management is rooted in strong ideals of collectivism, egalitarianism and autonomy (Kokkinidis, 2015b). More broadly, processes of institutional resistance have been shown to display a partisan, ideological nature (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007; Simons & Ingram, 1997; Tilcsik, 2010). This is why it is important to unveil the role of ideology in the process of institutional resistance, which we suggest is particularly salient in the case of alternative organising.

To explore this question, we study the case of Cecosesola, a Venezuelan co-operative that has nurtured practices of radical self-management for more than 35 years. Divergence with dominant institutional prescriptions has not prevented self-management from being sustained over the decades and the co-operative from growing significantly. Our study shows that, in this process, ideology can be mobilised to (1) justify resistance to institutional forces perceived as hostile and garner support for the alternative organisational form; (2) facilitate the integration of workers, despite their high turnover, into a family-like system by fostering shared identification with and commitment to the project; and (3) regulate worker behaviour through organisational mechanisms that prevent deviance and ensure compliance. However, our findings also show that sustained resistance is achieved at the cost of individual sacrifices and may lead to the creation of an authoritarian values-based system that involves dynamics of homogenization and exclusion.

These findings first contribute to the institutional resistance literature by showing how ideology can help recreate a protective, morally charged institutional system at the organisational level (Shadnam & Lawrence, 2011; Van Dijk et al., 2011). Focusing on alternative organisational settings in which sustained resistance is the organisational *raison d'être* (e.g., Dufays et al., 2020; Kokkinidis, 2015a), we extend previous work that has focused on such resistance as a temporary phenomenon (Purdy & Gray, 2009; van Gestel & Hillebrand, 2011). Moreover, as we highlight that institutional resistance is achieved at the cost of individual sacrifices, our research emphasizes the costly and complex nature of resistance and warns against its romanticising (Courpasson, 2016; de Holan, 2016; Hardy, 2016).

Second, our findings contribute to the literature on self-management and related 'alternative' forms of organisation (Barin-Cruz et al., 2017) by documenting the powerful role of organisational ideology in avoiding degeneration and enabling the maintenance of self-management over time. By doing so, we extend the work that has mainly focused on implementing specific practices to avoid degeneration (Atzeni, 2012; Cheney & Munshi, 2017), shifting the focus towards the ideological drivers behind these practices and connecting them with the organization's institutional environment (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Ozarow & Croucher, 2014). Importantly, through showing how sustaining self-management may be achieved at the expense of workers' heterogeneity and inclusion, we contribute to documenting the paradoxical implication of ideological mobilisation in supporting alternative organisational forms (Lee & Edmondson, 2017).

Theoretical background

In this section, we first review the literature on institutional resistance and introduce ideology as an important yet under-explored driver of such resistance. Then, we integrate these notions within the literature on self-management as an emblematic case of alternative organising.

Institutional resistance and ideology

How organisations resist institutional pressures that they perceive as hostile to their distinctive organisational practices has long been a theme in institutional theory (Battard et al., 2017; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Oliver, 1991; Schilke, 2018). Early institutionalists focusing on organisational conformity documented how institutional pressures could be resisted through ‘avoidance’ strategies (Oliver, 1991) such as decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), i.e., complying with institutional prescriptions only in appearance while keeping distinctive internal patterns intact (Tilcsik, 2010). More recently, attention has shifted towards more active ‘manipulation’ strategies (Oliver, 1991) whereby organisations pursue institutional change (Battilana et al., 2009) or at least ‘make a virtue of their active departure from institutional beliefs’ (Oliver, 1991, p. 157). For example, organizations may try to influence public regulations, shape industry standards, or change cultural mindsets in a way that better accommodates their distinctive practices (e.g., Dorado, 2005; Lawrence et al., 2011; Mars & Lounsbury, 2009).

Both perspectives entail some form of ‘institutional resistance’, i.e. a refusal to comply with the prescriptions of dominant institutions. However, such resistance is generally seen either as a partial (in the case of decoupling) or a temporary phenomenon (in the case of pursuing institutional change). Resistance has indeed often been framed as a temporary phenomenon in the context of struggles for field dominance (Purdy & Gray, 2009; van Gestel & Hillebrand, 2011), which are particularly salient when fields are fragmented and present contradictions (Battard et al., 2017; Crane, 2013; Lepoutre & Valente, 2012; Sherer & Lee, 2002). There has been less research on *sustained* institutional resistance as a relatively stable posture whereby organisations embody resistance as their *raison d’être* without actively trying to change the institutional environment that they seek to resist (Schilke, 2018).

Sustained resistance is likely to be facilitated when organisations develop material and symbolic immunity to a hostile logic (Lepoutre & Valente, 2012), when they mobilise emotions (Cartel et al., 2019), or when they foster members' identification (Schilke, 2018). In the case of alternative organisations, resistance is a defining feature that may be deployed even when the environment is not objectively hostile but rather perceived as such (Parker et al., 2014). To fuel such antagonistic perception and imbue resistance with meaning on the long run, an important but less explored resource that can be mobilised is organisational ideology (e.g., Dufays et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2016).

Ideology, as a discursive resource, enables groups to anchor a specific meaning into their social practices in relation to the dominant institutional context (Luyckx & Janssens, 2020; Van Dijk, 2006). At the heart of ideology lies the connection between what *is* and what *ought to be*, enabling members to collectively 'make sense of the dominant institutional influence, articulate an alternative philosophy, translate the alternative into practice, and acquire material resources for undertaking resistance at the local organizational level' (Bisel et al., 2017, pp. 410–411). Within an organisation, ideology provides workers with 'a clue to understanding and a guide to action' (Wilson, 1973, p. 91); it specifies which outcomes are desirable and how they can best be achieved (Simons & Ingram, 1997). Ideological beliefs thus carry an explicit evaluative component (i.e., a social critique) and an implicit behavioural component (i.e., a proposed solution) (Fine & Sandstrom, 1993), connecting the 'recognition or realization that things cannot go on as they are' to the 'generative construction of a coherent discourse that supports and enables action' (de Holan, 2016, p. 94). This is particularly salient in the case of alternative organisations (Parker et al., 2014). By definition, these organisations embody resistance against dominant institutional norms that are seen to produce domination and inequality, and experiment with ideologically distinctive ways of conceiving and inhabiting organisations (Kokkinidis, 2015a).

Ideology differs from culture in that it covers cultural meanings that are self-conscious, partisan, and authoritatively articulated (Van Dijk, 1998), as opposed to other subsets of culture that fall under common sense, tradition, and taken-for-grantedness (Geertz, 1973). Thus, while culture ‘is a context’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 14), ideology is directly associated with the notion of partisanship and therefore relies on mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and social positioning within a given cultural context (Van Dijk, 1998). In contrast with sociocultural norms and values, which are not disputed within a given culture or society, ideology involves the struggles and world views of specific groups of people and their relationships with other ideological groups (Dallyn, 2014; Mutch, 2009). An ideological lens thus appears particularly useful to understand how self-managed organisations resist their institutional environment and how such resistance can be sustained over time.

Sustaining self-management

As an emblematic type of alternative organising, self-managed organisations are collectively owned by the workers, who directly manage decision-making processes at different levels of the organisation and hold a right on profits (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). The ways in which this is implemented in practice may vary, from some form of workers’ participation while retaining certain managerial control (Bretos & Errasti, 2017), to more radical models in which hierarchical levels are strongly reduced (if not suppressed), task design and implementation are largely integrated, differences in salaries and working conditions are kept as low as possible, and decisions tend to be taken by consensus (Kokkinidis, 2015b, 2015a; Lee & Edmondson, 2017; Luhman, 2006; Simons & Ingram, 1997).

Despite possible economic benefits in terms of increased efficiency and productivity (Dow, 2018), self-managed organisations face the threat of ‘degeneration’ whereby they gradually dilute the distinctiveness of their practices (Pek, 2021; Storey et al., 2014). Such degeneration

does not necessarily take place because of deliberate external pressure but because of the difficulty to sustain practices that are radically deviant from dominant norms on the long run (Atzeni, 2012; Cheney & Munshi, 2017). Degeneration is more likely to happen in the case of economic success, rapid growth, and involvement of non-members in organisational governance (Sutherland et al., 2014). A more recent line of work, however, suggests that this is not a fatality and provides theoretical arguments for, and examples of, ‘regeneration’ dynamics (Bretos & Errasti, 2017; Cornforth, 1995; Diefenbach, 2019; Pek, 2021). For example, scholars have explored how the hierarchic trends can be prevented through shared leadership (Pansera & Rizzi, 2020; Sutherland et al., 2014) and collective decision-making (Jaumier, 2017; Kokkinidis, 2015a; Storey et al., 2014; Sutherland et al., 2014). In addition, several authors have highlighted sharing of information and knowledge as a necessary condition for effective self-management (e.g., Bernstein, 1976; Cornforth, 1995; Errasti et al., 2016; Leach, 2015; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). This may be facilitated, for example, by implementing job rotation schemes and regular sharing of expertise as a way to limit the centralisation of power (Cornforth, 1995; Kokkinidis, 2015b; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). Finally, efforts to counter degenerative tendencies also include restricting size and controlling growth (Rothschild-Whitt, 1976), as well as gaining the support of a network of stakeholders (Pansera & Rizzi, 2020).

However, much of this literature focuses on the ways in which organisations may implement this set of organisational practices to avoid degeneration. While insightful, such focus on protective practices themselves neglects the ideological drivers underlying self-management, i.e. its roots into ideals of collectivism, egalitarianism and autonomy (Kokkinidis, 2015b). As a result, the roles of ideology in fuelling ‘regeneration’ and sustaining self-management in resistance to institutional pressures have been largely overlooked in the literature (Ozarow & Croucher, 2014). In other words, emphasizing the ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ may obscure the more

fundamental ‘what for?’, which we suggest is instrumental to understand how self-management and other alternative forms can be sustained over time (Heras-Saizarbitoria & Basterretxea, 2016; Ozarow & Croucher, 2014).

Moreover, introducing an ideological lens may help better understanding the paradoxes of sustaining self-management ‘at any cost’ (Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Extant work has mainly focused on the origins and expressions of paradoxes in alternative organizing (Audebrand, 2017; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Hernandez, 2006; Stohl & Cheney, 2001), identifying paradoxes of performance (typically financial versus social), identity, organisation and learning (Audebrand, 2017; Smith et al., 2013). However, less attention has been devoted to the paradoxes implied by the very process of resisting hostile pressures to sustain alternative organising over time (e.g., Pek, 2021). Because ‘the contradictions with the context inevitably manifest themselves inside the organization as well’ (Varman & Chakrabarti, 2004, p. 183), it is important to understand the potentially paradoxical implications of mobilising ideology to resist such context over time (Hernandez, 2006). This is consistent with Stohl and Cheney (2001, p. 354) who have observed instances of ‘democratic organizations institutionalizing their norms in a way that ends up making organizations undemocratic’ (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 354). In this study, we therefore suggest that acknowledging the paradoxical nature of self-managed organizations allows to better understand the opportunities, but also the costs, of sustained efforts to maintain self-management over time.

To summarise, we suggest that ideology plays an important role in explaining whether and how organisations can sustain self-management and resist antagonistic institutional prescriptions — in this case, tendencies towards hierarchy as conveyed for example through regulations, professional roles, or the educational system (Ozarow & Croucher, 2014). However, such ideology-laden sustaining efforts may affect the paradoxes inherent in self-management and

more broadly alternative organising. In order to document the opportunities but also the costs of mobilising ideology to sustain self-management in resistance to hostile institutional pressures, we focus on the Cecosesola co-operative and explain in the next section why it offers a promising setting to explore our research question.

Methods

In this section, we first provide more details on the context of our research at Cecosesola and we then explain the process of collecting and analysing our data.

Research context

This research relies on a four-month ethnographic study of a Venezuelan self-managed co-operative, Cecosesola, combined with extensive archival data analysis and follow-up online contacts. We focused on Cecosesola because it remarkably combines two important elements of our research project that do not often go hand in hand: it is one of the longest-lasting self-managed organisations worldwide, and it is simultaneously one of the most radical examples, forged by a history of stark resistance to its institutional environment (e.g., Bastidas-Delgado, 2007; Pereira & Moreno, 2015). Cecosesola was created in 1967 as the first Regional Co-operative Centre gathering different types of co-operatives. The founders' idea was to bring together ten existing credit unions and healthcare co-operatives to jointly launch a funeral service, operated by the umbrella co-operative Cecosesola, that would also provide technical and operational services to its affiliated co-operatives. Cecosesola also started establishing practices of participation, such as job rotation and flattening the hierarchy. In 1974, Cecosesola began operating a bus transport service affordable to the poorest users, refusing to align its prices with the high fares proposed by competitors and designing routes in consultation with

the concerned communities. This, however, generated tensions with the other transport companies and the Municipal Council.

In parallel, a group of workers were unsuccessfully demanding a pay increase and the creation of a trade union within the co-operative. This internal contention created division between workers and inspired public mistrust in the organisation, further altering its relationship with key partners such as the Municipal Council and the credit institutions. In turn, this ‘transport crisis’ progressively led to public marches, petitions, and extensive propaganda (from both sides) in the media. Eventually, the crisis ended with the shutdown of Cecosesola’s transport service as well as massive financial losses.

In 1983, the remaining workers relaunched the co-operative, going much further in implementing an entirely self-managed organisation, which they anchored in a strong ideological resistance agenda to ‘consolidate social forces that generate processes of communitarian, economic, cultural and social transformation’ (bylaws 2002). The difficulties linked to the transport crisis, workers reported later, served as an impulsion to find a creative way out that transcended the traditional canons (org-2007). Concretely, Cecosesola and several of its affiliated co-operatives started dissolving their executive and supervisory boards, suppressing all formal hierarchical functions, and fully implemented self-management practices such as regular job rotation, consensus-based decision-making, and equal salaries and working conditions. Instead of formal functions, they created a set of responsibilities and tasks. Coordination started being performed in groups and in rotation, providing workers with a global vision of, and strong identification with, the co-operative (Freitez, 2012). For the workers, Cecosesola became a way to collectively respond to their needs, using the economic activity to generate higher salaries (through sharing of profits – the salary becoming an advance

payment of future profits, called *anticipo*), and provide access to basic goods and services at a low price for the broader community.

Over time, Cecosesola and its affiliated organisations expanded their activities, which now include six main sectors: funeral services, healthcare services, saving and credit services, agricultural production, craft food processing, and a food market. At the time of the study, Cecosesola consisted of 29 co-operatives and associations with almost 20,000 members benefitting from a range of goods and services. However, customers at the food markets — around 100,000 families — did not necessarily need to be members of Cecosesola or its affiliated organisations. The member associations and co-operatives were managed independently by their workers but maintained close ties with the Cecosesola co-operative. While the second-tier network totalled around 1,300 workers, 629 of them were directly worker-members of the Cecosesola co-operative, forming a specific first-tier co-operative; our analysis focuses on these workers. Amongst the 629 Cecosesola worker-members, 539 worked at the food markets, 68 at the main healthcare centre, 19 at the funerary home, and 13 were in charge of credit, sales and administrative services. Finally, it is worth noting that the turnover of Cecosesola worker-members was relatively high: between 2009 and 2012, Cecosesola hired between 91 and 232 worker-members and lost between 75 and 149 every year.

The high turnover as well as the long-standing radical self-management model stand in contrast with the more recent, state-sponsored co-operatives (Bastidas-Delgado, 2007; Harnecker, 2008), whose number has exploded under the Chavez government (Azzellini, 2009). Several studies have reported that these more recent co-operatives have weaker self-management practices if any, and fail to emphasise co-operative education (see e.g., Azzellini, 2009; Hernandez et al., 2008). This makes Cecosesola an extreme case (Chen, 2009) of radical self-management that stands out even in the contemporary Venezuelan context.

Data collection and analysis

Ideology gains to be studied in context (Kunda, 2006). Social practices constituting everyday routines of individuals ‘at work’ are a domain of empirical research for scholars who wish to ‘see’ and understand organisational ideology (Van Dijk, 1998). Thus, organisational ethnography (Ybema et al., 2009) enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how organisations are socially constructed and to unveil their ideological drivers (Kunda, 2006). Nevertheless, studies focusing on the daily experiences of workers are scarce in the literature on self-management (Jaumier, 2017). This study relies on a four-months ethnography, combined with extensive collection of archival data and follow-up online contacts over a period of 7 years (2014-2021).

Regarding the ethnography, the first author collected data on-site from August to November 2014 in the context of a non-contractual academic internship. She mainly worked at the food market and the healthcare centre, but she also visited all the other sectors of the co-operative. Her work consisted of a wide variety of tasks, including stocking shelves, billing, cooking, cleaning, controlling food quality, and participating in meetings and workshops. She was invited to stay at four different workers’ homes during the research period, enabling her to engage in numerous, at times sensitive conversations regarding work processes and underlying motivations.

From the beginning, it appeared that workers were reluctant to respond to questions in a formal, one-to-one setting – except for one well-respected founder with whom the first author conducted a long in-depth interview (int-1). More broadly, workers were cautious not to voice individual perspectives or to emphasize their own experience: for example, a woman who had been working at Cecosesola for a long time precisely refused to tell how long she had been there because, she argued, she did not want her voice to be considered more an authority than

someone else's. In addition, when talking to outsiders, workers always talked in plural ('we'). While being an interesting finding itself, such reluctance to voice individual perspectives led us to develop other data collection strategies including informal conversations, notes during meetings, and direct observations. Conversations were arranged with informants in function of the opportunities provided by the daily work, the time spent at home with workers and their families, and the journeys to different work locations. Conversations involved a diversity of workers in terms of age, gender, type of work, and membership duration. They were recorded through handwritten notes that both summarized the main contents and included short quotes that were noted in real time when they appeared particularly relevant (convers-date), and they were regularly discussed during online meetings with the second author. The contents of 47 'sectoral' and 'cross-sectoral' meetings totalling 225 hours (meet-#) were also summarized through handwritten notes including minutes and a large number of exact quotes recorded during the meetings.

The involvement of the first author in the co-operative enabled her to shift from 'participant observer' to 'observant participant', giving her access to 'backstage' information (Goffman, 1990) 'beyond the social front that informants present to strangers in their everyday lives' (Moeran, 2009, p. 148). In particular, this shift led her to grasp the ways in which workers willingly sacrificed parts of their private lives and had become emotionally attached to the co-operative. In parallel, to ensure as much objectivity as possible, the data was formalised and discussed with the second author during regular meetings.

To ensure higher validity (Yin, 2009), the data from the ethnography was triangulated and contextualised in a broader timeframe thanks to two additional data sources. Such work was performed at a distance by both authors between 2014 and 2021, enabling 'colder' insights on the co-operative and more critical perspectives. On the one hand, we conducted a systematic

analysis of the academic and grey literatures related to the founding of Cecosesola and key events in its history. Such analysis included external reports, academic literature, monographs, online videos, newspaper articles, online blogs and magazines, as well as documents produced by the organisation or some of its workers. The organisational documents include posts from the Facebook and webpage of the co-operative (web-year), as well as self-edited online videos (video-year), reports and books (org-year) explaining their history, vision and practice of self-management both to workers and to external audiences interested to know more about the Cecosesola co-operative.

On the other hand, after the ethnography, from 2015 to 2021, we gathered additional data, asking for focused information and examining recent events in order to complete the insights from the ethnography. This took the form of regular follow-up e-mail exchanges (mail-date) and skype conversations (convers-date), in parallel to collecting documents as described above. We paid special attention to the co-operative's relationships with its institutional environment, for example during a campaign against the new tax law in 2014–2015. Except for a few academic publications on the co-operative, all the data was collected in Spanish, which the two authors speak fluently.

Combining these diverse information sources allowed for triangulation of the data, stronger objectivity, and complementary insights. For example, participant observation and regular chats with workers were useful to understand the everyday implementation of self-management as well as the ideological underpinnings of organisational practices. Complementarily, co-operative publications and other archival data enabled us to capture the positioning of the organisation with respect to its institutional environment, and to map current efforts to resist institutional prescriptions against the backdrop of the co-operative's history.

First, the data was analysed in order to identify mechanisms and processes enabling self-management to be sustained over time. Through open coding of field notes and collected documents (Charmaz, 2006), the first author identified 94 organisational elements that characterised the self-management structure and fostered its reproduction over time. In the second step, data was analysed jointly by both authors, allowing the second author to act as a critical reviewer and the first author to move beyond the empathetic relationship she had entered into with the informants during the ethnography to embrace more critical distance (Brewis, 2014). Repeated and critical discussions about the data over multiple years helped improve the validity of the analysis (Charmaz, 2006) and ‘reduce the puzzlement’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 16). These repeated discussions between the two authors, and with colleagues, led to identifying the strong ideological dimension underlying workers’ efforts to sustain self-management and nurturing the organisation’s oppositional ambition with regard to its institutional environment. Following an abductive process (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007), the empirical observation led to integrating an ideological lens into the analysis and refining our theoretical background.

With this focus on ideology, we came back to our data, defined additional empirical codes, grouped overlapping elements and removed non-relevant ones. Drawing on Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton (2012), we selected fifteen first-order codes describing how workers collectively used organisational ideology to sustain self-management over time. Following iterations with the literature on organisational ideology, these fifteen empirical codes were grouped into six second-order, thematic codes that summarised and interpreted the empirical elements. Further interaction with theory on institutional resistance helped us group the second-order codes into three main themes corresponding to the roles of ideology in sustaining self-management against hostile institutional pressures. The coding led to the data framework presented in Figure 1.

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Findings

In this section, we lay out our findings, focusing on how the longevity of Cecosesola's self-management model despite a constraining context can be explained through the development of a strong organisational ideology — which Cecoseola observers have described as 'something that resembles more a philosophy of life than a routine of work' (Pereira & Moreno, 2015, p. 73). We found that ideology was collectively mobilised in three different, complementary ways in order to sustain the self-managed organisation over time (see Figure 1): ideological justification, integration, and regulation. We examine these three roles in turn.

I. Ideological justification

A first role that emerged from our data analysis is 'ideological justification', i.e. mobilising ideology to internally justify self-management in resistance to external threats and garner external support.

Justifying self-management as resistance. The founders and early observers of Cecosesola emphasise how the co-operative has always been in conflictual relationships with its environment — including for example the local government, transport sector unions, and several competitors (Bastidas-Delgado, 2007; int-1). Our investigation suggests that these early conflictual relationships embedded the notion of resistance in the DNA of Cecosesola, imbued the environment with a permanent taste of hostility, and fuelled the need for the construction of 'something different' at a small scale. Following the context in which Cecosesola's self-managed model emerged, workers persistently framed the Venezuelan environment as hostile to their model, even when the political discourse seemed more favourable to self-management.

The organisational documents denounced, for example, ‘entrenched cultural trends encouraging workers to seek personal benefits’ (org-2009), and more broadly ‘a consumerist society [that] sells us the idea of a selfish, individualist and mainly irresponsible human being [and that] destroys the natural links of solidarity’ (org-1990). Capitalism and socialism were equally criticised as ‘manifestations of the occidental culture, [which] since childhood fosters individualistic desires of accumulation of knowledge, power and wealth’ (mail-Jan2017; int-1). Hostile pressures were also identified in corruption practices that were denounced as a tolerated, if not encouraged, behaviour fostering a culture of ‘non-liability’, promoting dependency and convenience, and encouraging people not to take responsibility for their actions.

Regarding the organisation of work in companies, hierarchisation and specialisation were largely denounced in numerous documents as detrimental to the development of self-management. Economic and political actors were criticised because they ‘propose one single form of organisation, where there are directors and directed, where there is mistrust, where authority comes from the role, where responsibility is mostly delegated, but in no way is it shared, where everybody tries to accumulate for oneself the biggest possible amount of information, knowledge, money and *in fine* personal power’ (org-2003a). The hierarchical organisation was rejected because it ‘divides and generates fights for power, which in turn creates a separation between manual and intellectual work, and unequal distribution of benefits’ (org-1974).

Laws and state support initiatives were also perceived as detrimental to self-management. For example, until changes to the Co-operative Law were made in 2001, Cecososola had to elect executive and supervisory boards (and hence to operate, at least in theory, through representative democracy), and workers were given the status of salaried workers (i.e.,

subordinated labour) instead of worker-members (i.e., associated labour receiving a regular *anticipo* of future co-operative profits). More recently, despite formal support for co-operatives introduced in the 1999 Constitution, workers denounced numerous hindrances to ‘true’ (i.e., self-managed) co-operatives. In several discussions, Cecosesola workers criticised the government’s intensive funding of co-operative projects without proper co-operative education because it led to the emergence of ‘false’ co-operatives.

In opposition to this negatively framed institutional environment, Cecosesola workers positioned their self-management practices as a relevant yet challenging alternative:

[...] it was a serious attempt to create working relations very different from those experienced by the majority of organisations. We considered that only by decreeing trust, flattening the structure and reaching equal pay we would be guaranteeing an important transformation in our behaviour [toward] solidarity, participation, responsibility and social engagement. At the beginning, everything seemed quite easy. The reality would be different. (org-2007)

Since the beginning, self-management was justified in ideological terms, as a way to resist a hostile environment and to build, here and now, the world that they aspired to (int-1). We observed that the opposition between external pressures and their own organisational practices was systematically recalled during meetings and in internal documents to maintain the adhesion to self-management practices. This opposition was also communicated to other stakeholders, as will be discussed next. However, we also observed some resistance to this oppositional view, particularly in sectors of activity with well-established professional codes. At the healthcare facilities in particular, it proved difficult to overcome hierarchical and pyramidal relationships between doctors, nurses and unspecialised workers. Some of the founding health co-operatives still worked with a formal hierarchy and a representative democracy model. At the main

healthcare centre, newly recruited doctors were reluctant to participate in the self-managed dynamic. In addition to being the only ones who received a different income, they were not much interested in participating in the regular meetings, neither in getting to know the other sectors of the co-operative. Such de facto exception was criticised but tolerated by other workers, as will be discussed further.

Mobilising external support. Beyond justifying the self-management model internally, much effort was devoted to neutralising hostile threats that would jeopardise the model. In this context, workers emphasised ideological resonance to mobilise support, starting with like-minded movements, organisations, and communities at both local and international levels. For example, when in 2014 the government introduced changes to tax laws that would have had negative consequences for co-operatives — amongst other things, they would have made it very difficult for co-operatives to continue paying a weekly *anticipo* (i.e., a share of future profits) to their workers instead of a wage — many co-operatives, including Cecosesola, lobbied for an exemption from this tax burden. To do so, in the continuity of previous struggles (int-1), Cecosesola mobilised support from customers and from ideological allies in Venezuela and abroad. This mobilisation took the form of solidarity letters, pictures shared in social media with hashtags, petition signatures, and pre-written e-mails sent to public officers.

Interestingly, support was also garnered from partners such as multinational food suppliers, who had little to do with Cecosesola's resistance project *per se*, yet supported specific practices emerging from the ideological orientation of the co-operative. Several such supplier partnerships were built thanks to practices that resonated with the suppliers, for example the low margins taken by the co-operative, its emphasis on fulfilling the needs of the community, or its trustful profile built over the years. A representative of a multinational supplier explained in an informal conversation that they gave priority to Cecosesola instead of other supermarkets

in the supply of food during periods of scarcity because of the ‘healthier’ and ‘non-opportunistic’ commercial relationship (convers-10.09.2014).

Finally, the lack of political support was mitigated through selective connections with politicians and through highlighting overlaps with targeted parts of the government agenda, emphasising for example that Cecosesola can ‘contribute to the true strengthening of the democratic system’ (org-1998). As another example, in an open letter to government officials in the 2015 campaign against the new tax law, Cecosesola workers wrote: ‘How can we justify that a capitalist organisation has priority over co-operatives whose activities fall within the objectives and the priorities of the *Plan de la Patria*?’. Moreover, Cecosesola workers regularly highlighted the co-operative’s economic weight as a leverage in negotiations, and recalled its anchoring in the community and consequent capacity for mobilisation to discourage political attacks against the co-operative (int-1). For example, in a recent publication (org-2020) they brought to the fore their ‘long story of communitarian empathy’ by referring to a study on Cecosesola’s societal impact that reported that 95% of the respondents would ‘help the co-operative if someone tried to harm it’.

It is worth emphasising that, even when advocating regulatory changes, Cecosesola workers’ main concern was not to transform their environment but, rather, to sustain their co-operative as a self-managed organisation. Indeed, while workers agreed to ‘tak[e] actions that eliminate obstacles against the co-operative movement, so that a favourable legal and social framework can be created’ (by-laws-1977, Art. 3), their main goal was to protect their own self-managed model and ‘not to put this force at the disposal of this or that noble cause’ (convers-19.08.2014). Organisational documents suggested that even though this ‘could be interpreted as a “selfish”, “coward” or “not committed” position’ (org-2003b), the workers’ efforts should remain focused on ‘building here and now the world that we want’ (org-2007).

II. *Ideological integration*

A second role that we identified is ‘ideological integration’, whereby workers were socialised and educated into the ideological project, leading them to identify with and commit to it.

Socialising workers into the ideological project. Socialisation and education appeared fundamental to help workers embrace the ideological dimension of the co-operative, ‘transforming individuals into *cooperativistas* driven by the logic of solidarity’ (int-1). Workers regularly depicted Cecosesola as a ‘school’ that helped them both at work but also in their personal life (e.g., meet-15; meet-30). Commenting on the socialisation process in an e-mail exchange, a long-time worker explained that ‘[c]hanging a culture requires practicing another culture, based on other values and relationships’ (mail-Aug2015a). Indeed, welcoming new workers whose training or background was at odds with self-management required socialising them away from the dominant cultural and cognitive patterns that the co-operative has been resisting (meet-27).

First, the education of the newcomers to the foundational values of Cecosesola was ensured by their mentors, i.e. the workers who introduced them to the co-operative in the first place. In addition, an ‘introduction tour’ of three weeks was established, during which newcomers were invited to visit all the sectors of activity of Cecosesola. This enabled them to talk to other workers and learn about the history and values of the co-operative. Furthermore, every month a small group of workers was invited to spend a week working in different areas of the co-operative, in order to familiarise themselves with the history and features of other entities. Moreover, workers regularly rotated jobs, allowing them to learn the technical aspects of different jobs. This was important to enable them to easily replace any worker who would leave for holidays or permanently withdraw from the co-operative. This also enabled them to understand how their common values concretised into different work activities. In addition,

workers enjoyed any opportunity to share experiences and recall the foundational values underlying their work practices, either during specific meetings organised to reflect on their processes and share experiences or spontaneously during one of the weekly meetings. Finally, education also took place during day-to-day activities, as observed regularly. For example, one worker explained that ‘there are meetings, but it is more like a permanent discussion, you discuss while arranging the eggs on the shelves, while doing other things’ (meet-3).

Workers frequently described the formative process as a keystone of the self-management process, because it allowed them to see work activities not as an end in itself, but rather as a means towards ‘a personal and organizational transformation [...] beyond personal and/or group individualism’ (org-2021). At a meeting, a long-time worker of the food market emphasised: ‘We are not just vegetable providers; we also are, but above all, we constantly ask ourselves: what is the educative process here?’ (meet-11). During an afterwork discussion, another worker reflected: ‘At Cecosesola you unlearn what you knew and learn a new way to be and to behave’ (convers-21.10.2014).

Second, workers also placed strong emphasis on the history of the co-operative (e.g., past social struggles, failures, and successes), using it to justify current self-management practices and help tackle new challenges. For example, we observed that when new recruits attended their first meeting, experienced workers took time to explain the co-operative’s history and values. Several times, the first author attended meetings aiming to help a group of producers to structure itself, during which members of older producer associations (sometimes coming from hundreds of kilometres away) shared their mistakes and recalled the initial funeral service, the ‘transport crisis’, how issues were solved and why Cecosesola evolved in this particular way. They also sometimes used audio-visual aid to tell this history and reflect about it. Such a collective and intergenerational transmission of knowledge not only made the ideological

foundations of self-management available to newcomers, but it also acted as a constant reminder to all workers.

However, socialisation was more difficult in certain areas, typically educating the doctors at the healthcare centre. This had been a topic of reflection for many years, as stressed by a worker: ‘It is important that the doctors also escape their daily tasks of consultations and operations. That way, they see what is happening at the market, in the meetings, and so on.’ (meet-4). At an extraordinary meeting to reflect on this issue, a long-time worker argued that it was necessary to ‘humanize the workplace’ (meet-19). However, despite continuous efforts to socialise the doctors, most of them limited themselves to medical duties and did not get involved neither in the other activities of the co-operative (job rotation) nor in the meetings, thereby forming a notable exception to the rule.

Fostering identification and commitment. Beyond socialisation, Cecosesola workers also aimed to foster strong identification with the collective project, ‘extending the circle of us towards an always larger family’ (web-2021). There is abundant evidence that such sense of belonging extended far beyond the organisational attachment that can be observed in ‘conventional’ companies – and workers regularly claimed this distinctive attachment as compared with other organisations. From the organisation’s perspective, the collective dimension was largely heralded in organisational documents, typically through anniversary slogans developed each year, for example: ‘fishing together’ (37th anniversary), ‘building relationships of trust together’ (43rd), ‘united in a collective effort’ (46th), and so on. This collective vision was also made tangible through the fact that everything was shared in the organisation (material, information, profits, responsibilities, knowledge, etc.).

A striking and consistent observation was that workers considered the organisation to be an extended family about which they truly cared. Once, the first author was walking in the large

courtyard of one of the markets, talking with a worker, when suddenly the worker dropped the conversation and walked away. He came back one minute later with a candy packaging that he had just picked up from the ground, explaining: ‘It hurts you if something is wrong in the co-operative; if you see that something is broken, it must hurt you because this is as if it was yours’ (convers-12.09.2014). While at the time of our study several workers were actually relatives, and in certain cases family ties played a role to find mentors in the recruitment process, the family perspective extended to all workers and even those who had no formal family ties strongly identified with this vision. For example, in a video, one worker declared: ‘Cecosesola is a part of life, of what one is living, of what one is. I mean, we carry it within us’ (video-2010). In several conversations, workers emphasized that they saw their work as a process of personal transformation whereby ‘self-management was no longer exogenous to someone but [became] endogenous’ (old-time worker, meet-19). Several informants also used love metaphors to describe their relationship with the co-operative. For example, a woman commented: ‘between me and the food market, it is like a love story. But after a few years, the routine threatens’ (convers-18.08.2014). A vegetable producer commented: ‘it is like a couple relationship, if there is no communication, everything collapses’ (convers-22.08.2014).

In return, however, total commitment was required from workers. One of the oldest workers of the funeral service explained, when recalling the history of the co-operative, that ‘each and every thing we have today costed a sacrifice from someone’ (convers-10.11.2014). Working at Cecosesola indeed implied to sacrifice a part of one’s private life. First, boundaries between private and professional lives were constantly blurred, and workers enjoyed little privacy. For example, we often observed that justifications not related to work were required, in front of everybody, for example when workers arrived late or left early at a meeting, or when they requested a loan or they withdrew money that exceeded their personal savings held in the co-operative’s accounts. As another example, the first author witnessed an ‘inquiry’ during a

meeting where a long-time worker was asked with what money he had bought his new fancy car. Indeed, some workers believed that his revenue from the co-operative was insufficient to afford the car, and suspected that he had been stealing from Cecosesola. When asking the worker hosting her about it, the first author was told that secretive and introvert workers were often regarded suspiciously.

Second, our observations show that workers were left with little time for life outside work. Working days lasted up to fifteen hours and working weeks up to six days, and we observed that the subject of the heavy work schedule was a taboo. During a meeting, one woman mentioned how they were all extremely tired from working so much. Immediately, the atmosphere became very tense, someone answered that they could not do anything about it, and the subject was dropped. In addition, we observed that parents could only devote little time with their children. For example, we witnessed a five-year-old child call his grandmother ‘mum’ in front of his actual mother, a Cecosesola worker whom he rarely saw because of the heavy working schedules. Finally, workers tended to put the co-operative first. Indeed, it was common that while on annual vacation, workers came to one of Cecosesola markets to help (for free) during busy days. In this context, pursuing personal passions outside work proved complicated. For example, a young man working at Cecosesola since his teen-age wanted to spend time playing in a music band. He was regularly missing weekly rehearsal and week-end concerts. After realising it was impossible to combine his passion with working at the co-operative, he regretfully chose to leave the co-operative.

III. Ideological regulation

The third role that emerged from our data analysis is ‘ideological regulation’, which refers to mobilising ideology to encourage workers’ total compliance and, in the case of deviance, force them to readjust or leave.

Inducing ideological compliance. To ensure the compliance of working practices with the ideological project, we were surprised to observe the lack of detailed and written rules. Rather, workers constantly formulated and recalled collective norms that operationalised ideological prescriptions and disciplined their behaviour. In several publications, the workers emphasized the need to fill the power vacuum with collective norms consistent with their core values. This required doing away with conventional management rules and practices: ‘We have removed a lot of hierarchical structures and functions, norms and processes that, according to the dogma, were indispensable, but from the point of view of our objectives were more like barriers blocking our development’ (org-1990). The collective norms embodied the values fostered by their ideology — ‘respect, solidarity, equity, criticism, responsibility, commitment, communication, transparency, honesty’ (by-laws-2002, Art. 2) — and emerged during the meetings, consensually, after long discussions.

Indeed, we observed that during their very frequent meetings, workers spent time discussing these collective norms rather than making actual decisions. Decision-making, in turn, happened on the spot, when facing the need to decide. Workers would then, individually or in small groups, make the decisions by referring to the collectively decided norms. Later, they would report their decision to the other workers during the weekly meetings, emphasising the fit with the agreed norms. Such internalisation of collective norms appeared central to ensure the unity and coherence of the group or, as they put it, ‘to coexist in an ever expanding “us” that has no limits and that implies internalising shared criteria’ (org-2010).

Collective norms included, for example, working in a thrifty way or prioritising collective long-term benefits instead of personal short-term profits. Interestingly, these norms could be re-evaluated at any moment, during meetings, to adapt to the contextual reality. For example, a former norm was to offer good quality food to the community. Therefore, workers at the food

warehouse could decide to reject a batch of damaged fruits and vegetables coming from a supplier. However, the food scarcity during our observation led workers to adapt their collective norm, after which workers could accept lower-quality produce (conversation-20.09.2014). Norms could also be re-evaluated following internal crises. For example, when workers realised someone was breaking into the co-operative premises at night, they decided to put more attention to the security of the premises, in particular to the keys and padlocks, implying for example that workers would need to take the initiative to change them more regularly and that those who had their own keys (e.g., the night guardians) would not lend them to others. Decisions, therefore, were open to reconsideration against the background of the collective norms, especially if someone considered that individualistic criteria had prevailed.

Collective norms appeared powerful because they acted as the basis of collective discipline, which replaced the absent hierarchy. Collective discipline was directed by workers to themselves, self-assessing one's behaviour to act in line with collective norms, and to one another. An old-time worker commenting on a previous theft explained in a meeting: 'when we don't respect the collective norms and when everybody does what they want, such things happen' (meet-18). In this context, the first author was regularly told of the importance to keep an eye on how other colleagues were working and behaving. Mutual scrutiny appeared quite strong because of workers' awareness-raising about the impact of their (lack of) actions on the collective. For example, weekly meetings bringing together more than one hundred people took place quietly and smoothly, without any pre-established agenda and without any meeting facilitator. During all the meetings, workers spoke one after the other in a spontaneous order — two people never spoke at the same time. Another example is the loans that workers could get from the co-operative. Even if they were allowed to extend the loan duration to two years, most workers tried to reimburse their loan before that 'because it comes from a collective fund,

so there is shared awareness that it's important to repay the money as quickly as possible' (convers-16-08-2014).

Another component of collective discipline that emerged from our observation was the importance given to setting a good example (e.g. arriving on time, or leaving the workspace clean for the next worker). Since there were no written procedures, new workers had to learn both the job and the collective norms by imitating other workers. On her first day of work at Cecosesola, the first author was given a place at the registration and cash desk of the healthcare centre. She was told to just 'do like him' (i.e., the colleague next to her) and was entrusted to cash in patients' money. Workers argued that they all 'need[ed] to be the guardians of this discipline' that compensated for the absence of hierarchy (meet-22). Concretely, we observed that workers regularly emphasized the need to work in a transparent way (e.g. keeping written account of money flows) so that anyone could come afterwards and check what had been done (meet-17). By doing so they intended to strive for quality in the task outputs: 'It is about not leaving things half done, to do them with responsibility, with respect for other people, with passion, by generating trust' (unpublished-2012).

In this context, the meetings were intended as places where workers could collectively reflect on their behaviours and actions, and on their way of connecting with one another. A woman explained that the meetings were mandatory precisely because it was mandatory to self-reflect (convers-01.09.2014). Such reasoning was explicitly evidenced at the beginning of the fieldwork, when a large amount of money was stolen from one of the safety deposit boxes at the central office. To our surprise, the workers did not seem surprised about what had happened, nor were they concerned about finding out who had stolen the money. During several meetings that followed, they talked about everything but the stolen money. After discussing this case with several workers, it became clear to the first author that instead of

seeking to identify the people involved in the theft, they were trying to determine which norms had not been complied with, and how they could adjust current norms to prevent that from happening again. According to them, everybody was responsible for the theft to a certain extent: had they continued to monitor whether collective norms were being followed, probably the situation would not have arisen. A worker summarised this as follows: ‘we have to learn again to react when we see things’ (meet-22). The challenge for them, therefore, was not to discover who had stolen the money — guilty workers would eventually be exposed — but to understand how to rebuild trust, and how to grow as a group from that situation. This required workers to accept that they all had a part of responsibility in the situation. After that, during several meetings, they examined and redefined some of their collective norms and reflected together on the importance of following those norms. One worker explained: ‘We reflect a lot, when one makes a mistake, on how that mistake could have happened [...]; we always reflect about the attitude of the collective and what happened for the situation to get to that point’ (meet-22).

Discouraging ideological deviance. As collective discipline was not always sufficient to align workers’ behaviour with the ideological project, there were regular cases of deviance (as illustrated by the example of the stolen money). However, there was also widespread fear that bad or undesired (e.g., selfish) behaviour might diffuse, as pointed in a meeting: ‘The new worker is going to do what he sees; so if you don’t respect the collective criteria, and for example you leave the cash register all dirty, and no one is going to point you out, then this bad behaviour is going to spread quickly’ (meet-26).

To counter deviance, mutual scrutiny was fundamental. Concretely, attitudes perceived as misbehaviour or inconsistent with collective norms had to be publicly denounced during meetings. Even long-term members happened to be the object of denunciations. For example,

at the end of an important meeting, workers argued that a founding worker should have been more talkative during recent meetings and should have used his experience to help foresee and resolve a particular problem. More broadly, the formation of small groups (called *grupismo* situations) and the lack of compliance with collective norms were denounced as acts of power that prevented ‘blurring the hierarchy’ (meet-32).

It is precisely to avoid division that voting was banned in 1983, since it divided workers into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (org-2003). Instead, consensual decisions allowed to develop the cooperative while ensuring alignment with the founding principles: ‘[Between the producers and the market] it is not about negotiations between two parts with conflicting interests, but consensual agreements between members of an organisation with common objectives that go much beyond the mere economic, individual or group fact’ (org-2003). During informal discussions, several workers also explained that regular conversations and face-to-face confrontations were important to avoid underhand acts of dissent or discontent.

Sometimes, however, the denouncements led to social pressure so strong that workers eventually decided to leave Cecosesola. Working at Cecosesola, thus, required from workers total commitment and alignment with collective norms. For those who did not, the outcome was clearly announced in meetings and documents, for example: ‘those who do not allow personal change in their lives get left on the roadside’ (org-2007)’. Denouncing was actually framed in a positive way by the workers: indeed, they used the term ‘*precisar*’, meaning ‘indicating’, which has a positive connotation. Such indications could concern precise facts, for example telling colleagues that they left early or arrived late. In other instances, it could target a more general behaviour such as laziness or individualism (meet-13; int-1).

Departures were always voluntary. At several meetings, we observed workers silently standing up and leaving. Departure might be temporary, allowing a worker to self-reflect on their past

behaviour. In that case, it was expected that the worker would make amends when coming back, before reintegrating the organisation. We observed that denunciations and critiques could be harsh and be voiced also by friends and family members working at the co-operative. However, critique appeared as a strong dimension of the ideological project and it was often framed as ‘necessary to make [workers] grow’ (meet-10; int-1). At a meeting, several workers insisted to avoid ‘falling into the *he is like that* excuse’ (meet-28) and stopping mutual scrutiny. Several publications also condemned the habit of finding justifications to individual or collective shortcomings, encouraging workers to acknowledge their mistakes and endorse responsibility for them.

Exit from the co-operative could also be permanent. We witnessed cases in which workers felt that they had committed a fault so serious that mutual trust was irretrievably lost. Most of the time, permanent exit stemmed from workers who felt that they did no longer fit into Cecosesola’s working environment. We observed that workers tended to support those spontaneous withdrawals, as it allowed them to work only with people committed to and motivated by the ideological project. After witnessing such a departure, an experienced worker (daughter of a founder) explained: ‘Sometimes people come to Cecosesola and start realising the responsibilities workers must take on, and the quantity of work that is required, and they don’t like it; other people want a boss to be told what to do’ (convers-15.08.2014).

Discussion and conclusion

Our study of a self-managed co-operative aimed to explore the ways in which organisational ideology can be collectively mobilised to sustain alternative organising in resistance to hostile institutional pressures. Our findings suggest that ideology may fuel institutional resistance in three different ways: as a normative justification for developing and supporting the alternative model in spite of hostile institutional prescriptions; as a cultural-cognitive framework to engage

workers and integrate them into the resistance project; and as a regulatory framework ensuring member compliance and preventing their deviance from ideological prescriptions. However, our findings also document the paradoxical implication of mobilising a strong ideology and its cost in terms of individual sacrifices, exclusion of members and reduction of group heterogeneity. In this section, we discuss these findings and explain how they contribute to the literatures on institutional resistance on the one hand, and self-management and alternative organisations on the other hand.

These findings contribute, first of all, to better understanding the ideological underpinnings of sustained institutional resistance by organisations. The three roles of ideology identified in this research help explain how organisations may resist and ‘defy’ dominant institutional pressures perceived as hostile without primarily trying to alter these pressures (Oliver, 1991; Schilke, 2018). Rather, our findings document how efforts of (alternative) organisations can become focused on realising their purpose here and now, within the boundaries of the organisation. Such resistance ‘seeks the construction of something different outside of the existing social order, and refuses contact with it’ (de Holan, 2016, p. 94). This thus appears as a productive — rather than reactive — form of resistance (Courpasson, 2016; Kokkinidis, 2015b) that is deeply rooted into a specific ideology. Such ideology allows the workers to interpret their surrounding institutional environment, articulate an alternative model, and translate it into distinctive everyday practices that can be routinised and sustained over time (Bisel et al., 2017).

The translation of ideology into routinised norms and practices leads the organisation to produce its own ‘institutional system’ that entails normative, cultural-cognitive, and regulative dimensions (Scott, 2001). Normative elements are salient in the process of ostracising external threats in order to justify resistance and mobilise workers to support the alternative form. This finding resonates with the notion of ‘normative control’ (Kunda, 2006) that makes it possible

not only to isolate workers from hostile pressures, but also to create an external threat that enables aligning individual interests with organisational ones (Langmead, 2016). Second, ideological integration entails cultural-cognitive elements that ensure identification and attachment to the family-like social system in which, ultimately, individuals take their work at the organisation for granted (Chen, 2009) as part of their individual identity as ‘members’ (Kunda, 2006). While emotional attachment may be found in other settings including conventional corporations (e.g. Google), we have shown that the type of identification documented here, imbued with ideology-driven resistance, extends beyond the work sphere to capture individuals’ identity as a whole. Third, our findings highlight the regulative role of ideology (Van Dijk, 1998), in which mechanisms of compliance (collective norms and discipline) and sanctions (mutual scrutiny and denunciations) force workers to either fully comply with collective rules, or leave — thereby precluding non-committed membership (Barker, 1993). Our findings highlight the mutually reinforcing nature of these three different roles, whereby organisational ideology enables to build a ‘morally charged’ (Shadnam & Lawrence, 2011) institutional system at the organisational level (Van Dijk et al., 2011). In this way, the ideological resistance project underlying the alternative organisational form is turned into an ‘institution in its own right’ (Greenwood et al., 2011, p. 349).

Examining sustained self-management through an ideological lens also allows us to highlight the collective dimension of institutional resistance, extending previous work that has emphasised the role of founders in this process (Bisel et al., 2017; Ormrod et al., 2007). While several authors have emphasised the tensions arising among resisting individuals even when they jointly resist against ‘an undesirable other’ (Hardy, 2016), our work highlights the collective efforts to evacuate such tensions through embedding ideology-driven resistance into individuals’ routines and identity (Chen, 2009; Kunda, 2006). Such collective homogenisation leaves less space for internal differences and conflicts (Greenwood & Gonzalez Santos, 1992;

Rothschild & Whitt, 1986), with departure or exclusion being the only option for deviant workers. In brief, collective discipline and control help to ban internal resistance at the favour of institutional resistance as the *raison d'être* of the organisational project.

Finally, our work also shows that ideological mobilisation leads workers who decide to stay at the co-operative to accept situations that have been described as problematic in the literature, for example poor work-life balance (Kokkinidis, 2015b) and high turnover (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014). It complements existing studies that argue that while resistance builds on collective energy and determination, mobilises widespread solidarity and engagement, and engenders strong feelings of belonging, it also often implies personal sacrifices (Courpasson, 2016). In this case, workers willingly accept to sacrifice both their private life and personal aspirations in favour of a project of which they have, collectively, determined both the ends and the means. Because of this identification, workers become socially constructed by the system they have themselves created (Barker, 1993), and willingly comply to personal sacrifices — without apprehending them as such. These findings thus not only point out the costly and complex nature of resistance, but also support the argument against romanticising it (Courpasson, 2016; de Holan, 2016; Hardy, 2016).

The second set of contributions relate to the literature on self-management and more broadly alternative organising (see e.g., Jaumier, 2017; Kokkinidis, 2015a; Lee & Edmondson, 2017). Our findings respond to recent calls to understand the ‘tools, processes and systems that could enable democratic decision-making at scale to be sustained in organizational contexts’ (Battilana et al., 2018, p. 277). More particularly, our findings complement the literature on degeneration and regeneration (e.g., Bretos & Errasti, 2017; Pek, 2021) by highlighting the role of ideology in strengthening internal cohesion and resisting against a context ostracised as hostile (Luyckx & Janssens, 2020; Van Dijk, 2006). We suggest that ideological mobilisation

is a necessary condition to sustain self-management practices over time. Such condition is likely to be found to varying degrees in long-lasting self-managed and more broadly alternative organisations (e.g., Boone & Özcan, 2014; Simons & Ingram, 1997). Our findings thus help explain why organisations that disconnect self-management practices from their underlying values are likely to face degeneration (Pek, 2021).

Interestingly, our findings show that ideological mobilisation does not seem to require stable membership. Indeed, the high turnover of workers which, at first sight, might be considered an obstacle to sustaining self-management (Stryjan, 1994), can be turned into an opportunity for preventing degeneration. Indeed, turnover enables replacing reluctant workers with new ones who quickly become socialised into the system (Barker, 1993), and whose individual aspirations fade away for the sake of reproducing self-management as a taken-for-granted and self-sustaining organisational form (Langmead, 2016). Such regeneration process enables to secure and reproduce self-management, yet it also leads, paradoxically, to new forms of authority and control (Barker, 1993). Indeed, one of the ambitions of self-management is to foster a new type of egalitarian working relationships, for example through job rotation and equitable pay conditions, in order to avoid overdue power through task or knowledge specialisation (Cornforth, 1995; Kokkinidis, 2015b; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). The drawback, however, is that everybody can be easily replaced at the first misstep.

As a result, in such an organisation, hierarchy may be replaced by another, more subtle and collective authoritarian system, in which authority takes the form of values and collective norms (Barker, 1993). Therefore, we challenge the view of homogenisation as being necessarily beneficial because it would nurture committed membership (Gutiérrez-Johnson & Whyte, 1977; Rothschild & Whitt, 1986), help socialising new members into the organisation (Bretos & Errasti, 2017; Stryjan, 1994), or limit the power of certain members (Pérotin, 2016).

Rather, our findings further document how homogenisation may lead self-managed workers to unconsciously ‘tighten the iron cage’ around themselves (Barker, 1993). However, contrarily to Barker's case study (1993), the Cecosesola case shows how the core values and attendant collective norms may be maintained even without being transformed into rational and objective rules.

In sum, we identify a paradox in the fact that to secure and reproduce self-management, new forms of authority and control must be developed that involve dynamics of homogenization and exclusion. Our findings thus extend previous work showing that the reproduction and legitimization of authoritarian governance can be observed even in ‘well-intentioned’ schemes such as worker participation in corporations (Brière, 2017) and representative democracy (Kokkinidis, 2012). Rather, we show that consensus does not necessarily ‘create a more inclusive model of participation’ (Kokkinidis, 2015a, p. 431). Indeed, if consensus is guaranteed by the prior homogenisation of membership through ideological socialisation and exclusion of deviant members, the debating and social negotiation between opposing parties — a characteristic of democratic systems (Shapiro, 1999) — is eliminated. Therefore, we argue that not only representative democracy schemes may lead to homogenization and the exclusion of some people or ideas (see Kokkinidis, 2015b), but also more direct forms of democracy, such as self-management, especially when organisational maintenance becomes a goal in itself. The longevity of our case thus enables us to bring nuanced insights that complement the studies of more recent self-managed experiences (e.g., Barker, 1993; Kokkinidis, 2015b, 2015a; Vieta, 2020).

To conclude, our study suffers from two main limitations, each of which provides opportunities for future research. First, despite our efforts to triangulate the data and maintain methodological rigor, our research mainly relied on observations, conversations and documents coming from

within the co-operative. Therefore, our access to perspectives from external stakeholders was limited. Moreover, the emergence of organisational ideology to fuel institutional resistance may have been re-interpreted ex post by the workers in the context of justifying their current practices (Brewis, 2014). Similarly, following an ‘anchoring effect’ (Furnham & Boo, 2011), Cecosesola workers might have been marked by their initial impressions about the co-operative, leading them to downplay subsequent information contrasting with such impressions, for example internal conflicts and power plays. Therefore, more micro-level research on how organisational ideology is driven by certain groups with specific goals and how it is contested by, and diffused across, different categories of workers, would yield relevant insights (e.g., see Mees-Buss & Welch, 2019). Moreover, future studies could use a broader, multi-stakeholder setting to elucidate the dialectical relationship between alternative, ideologically-driven organisations and their environment.

Second, the findings are based on a single case study and are thus embedded in Venezuelan history and culture. However, the purpose of the study was to focus on an ‘extreme’ case (Chen, 2009) to highlight underlying elements of sustained self-management that may be present to lesser degrees in other self-managed, alternative organisations developing a strong organisational ideology. Following Battilana et al. (2018), we therefore call for a comparison of other cases of self-management across multiple settings to highlight how cultural and socio-economic variations enable or disable the reproduction of self-managed and, more generally, alternative organisational forms. Indeed, in the context of imagining economic alternatives (Atzeni, 2012; Parker et al., 2014), future research could further build on the insights of our study to explore the opportunities but also the costs of sustaining other types of ideologically-driven alternative organisational forms and practices over time, for example recuperated firms (Esper et al., 2017), community-supported agriculture schemes (Michel, forthcoming), consumer co-operatives (Zitcer, 2015), alternative finance initiatives (Meyer & Hudon, 2017),

and more generally community-based alternatives (Tedmanson et al., 2015). We expect that our study will provide a useful basis for future research examining how different forms of alternative organising can mobilise ideology to sustain themselves in a hostile institutional context.

Post-scriptum

Since the on-field data collection in 2014, Venezuela has further sunk into a severe and complex crisis. Such crisis has resulted in a collapsing economy, unprecedented hyperinflation (over 65,000% in 2018 according to the International Monetary Fund), drastic rise in extreme poverty (from 10% of the population in 2014 to 85% in 2018), increased criminality and corruption, further scarcity in necessity goods and services, boom in black markets, and mass migration. Our latest information suggests that, in spite of this tough context as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, Cecosesola workers have continued demonstrating much resilience and determination. It seems that their self-managed model has helped them to quickly adapt their working practices without losing sight of their ideological foundations. To share just one example: during a massive five-days blackout that prevented them to use card payment devices and led to waves of violence elsewhere in the country, they refused to stop working and let thousands of customers go home with their groceries for free. Almost all customers came back a few days later to repay their debt. In a publication, they analysed recent events in the following way: ‘a chaotic situation can be the starting point of a process of cultural change [...], provided that the change starts with oneself’ (Cecosesola, 2021).

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