

Call for Abstracts

Alternative organizing within and beyond alternative organizations

**Critical Management Studies beyond the Academy? 30th June – 2nd July 2027,
Lancaster University**

Session type: Hybrid

Convenors:

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Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Statement: We are committed to provide a welcoming experience for everyone. While our convenors are from two European institutions, one team member comes from the Global South. We have a range of experience within the team including a PhD candidate, an Early Career Researcher and a Professor. We endeavour to create and sustain a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment in our stream respecting every participant's: race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical ability, cognitive differences, religion, age, socioeconomic status and national origin. We can support participants for whom English is a second language. Members of our team are able to speak Spanish, German and French.

How can alternative organizational practices help us imagine, build and sustain more democratic, ecological and liveable futures? We ask this question as a response to growing doubts about the legitimacy, public purpose and social value of universities and management research. We are particularly interested in how critical scholarship can engage with and learn from practices through which people are already experimenting with different ways of organizing social, economic and ecological life.

Alternative organizations offer one important site for this work. Cooperatives, voluntary and third sector organizations, community groups, social movements, democratic workplaces, mutual aid networks, commons-based initiatives, post-growth projects and activist collectives are spaces in which different forms of organizing are already practised. Recent work treats alternative organizing not as a fixed organizational type, but as a contested, processual and prefigurative set of practices through which people unsettle dominant orders, create alternative imaginaries and sustain different forms of life in the present (Schiller-Merkens, 2024; Bhatt et al., 2024; Husted et al., 2026; Vijay et al., 2026).

This stream explores alternative organizing within and beyond alternative organizations. Rather than asking whether whole organizations can be replicated or scaled, we ask what can be learned from particular practices, relationships, infrastructures and imaginaries. Which practices help people live more democratic, ecological and/or collective lives? Which become diluted, captured or domesticated in mainstream organizational, policy or academic settings?

The stream is organised around three interrelated questions. First, *which alternative organizing practices might have relevance beyond their specific context?* Research on alternative organizations and new social movements shows how organizing can become inseparable from identity, politics and everyday life, including conviviality, mutual aid, collective autonomy and prefigurative practice (Reedy et al., 2016). Work on nonprofits as schools for democracy suggests that voluntary and third sector organizations should be understood not only through their civic outcomes, but also through internal practices of democracy, participation and good work (King and Griffin, 2019). Recent work on democratic organizing and worker cooperatives also reopens questions of voice, alienation, ownership and governance (Battilana et al., 2025; Mena et al., 2026; Langmead and Parker, 2026).

Second, *what mechanisms support the diffusion, adaptation or development of such practices beyond their original settings?* CMS has often discussed alternatives through critical performativity and intervention (Spicer et al., 2009). Yet alternatives may not move through scaling, growth or replication. Degrowth, ecological and post-growth thought invite other ways of thinking about how alternatives develop: through germination, engendering, care, repair, inheritance, maintenance, refusal and regeneration (Latour and Schultz, 2022; Slade Shantz et al., 2025; Dahlman et al., 2022).

Third, *what is, or could be, the role of academics in identifying, theorising, supporting or diffusing alternative organizing practices?* Academics may act as theorists, collaborators, witnesses, facilitators, translators, critics, participants or co-producers. They may articulate principles embedded in practice, connect practitioners across settings, or support new

organizational imaginaries. But scholars can also extract from practice, speak for movements, domesticate alternatives into academic concepts, or reproduce the hierarchies they seek to contest. Work on critical performativity and democratic intervention shows both the promise and difficulty of academic engagement, including failure, refusal and unintended domination (King and Land, 2018). Work on practically engaged CMS suggests that meaningful academic-practitioner connections require co-production, decolonial thinking (Mainard-Sardon et al. , 2026), democratic research processes and more fluid academic roles (King and Griffin, 2024).

We welcome empirical, theoretical, methodological and practice-based contributions addressing questions such as: Which alternative organizing practices help us imagine democratic, ecological or post-growth futures? What supports or constrains their diffusion, translation, germination, regeneration or institutionalisation? How do alternative organizations negotiate tensions between participation and efficiency, autonomy and dependence, purity and compromise, growth and refusal, survival and transformation (Alakavuklar, 2024; Shanahan, 2025; Friedrich and Lüthy, 2025; Powell and Bartels, 2026)? The aim is not to celebrate alternatives uncritically or translate them into managerial recipes. It is to examine how democratic, ecological and liveable futures might be imagined and built through alternative organizing within, beyond and against existing organizations.

Submission Information:

We welcome submissions for traditional 'paper' and alternative forms of presentation (visual/auditive arts, poems, etc), and workshops on specific topics. We especially welcome submissions which create dialogue with practitioners and activists interested in developing alternative models and practices.

Please submit a short abstract (300- 500 words) by email to Clemens Dieler (clemens.dieler@grenoble-em.com) by **Tuesday 1st of December 2026**. We'll communicate acceptance decisions by Friday 29th of January 2027.

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