

Review

# Cooperative Organization and Its Characteristics in Economic and Social Development (1995 to 2020)

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**Abstract:** Proceeding from the idea that it is possible to correlate economic with social development, this research focus on cooperatives and their management systems. Based on studies and publications on cooperative management practices in several countries, this study seeks to acquire sufficient knowledge about cooperatives to understand them as efficient and proactive organizations. They seek an alignment between economic and social development of their members sharing a common goal of prosperity. This study pursues the following question: “Does the competence of the operational management of cooperatives make it possible for cooperative members to overcome the obstacles that prevent their social and economic development?” To answer this question, it was proposed to carry out a bibliometric analysis of the cooperative systems in several countries between 1995 and 2020, with the focus on the economic and social development of their members. As for the methodology employed in this study, a collection of publications on cooperatives in the world and a systematic review was organized. As a result, the characteristics of cooperatives could be identified, allowing an overview of the organizations’ qualifications as promoters of social and economic development.

**Keywords:** cooperatives; characteristics; economic development



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## 1. Introduction

Since capitalism has played a decisive role in the business world, there has also been a growing dissatisfaction among people. They have sought alternative ways of organizing their lives within the capitalist system according to their related activities. By means of mutual aid, they can fulfill their basic needs, as well as have full freedom of production and work. This scenario is described in the discussions after the Industrial Revolution, as exemplified by [1–3], among others.

These authors discuss the influence of industrialization upon the working class, subjected to unequal treatment and distribution of profits. Their workforce was exploited, and they were subjected to mistreatments from the bourgeois class, which insisted on violating the workers’ human rights and consequently did not let them be free and independent people, neither economically nor socially. Against this backdrop, movements for a more humane and egalitarian treatment arose. They fought against the capitalist system and the structural changes in labor that came along with it [4]. As an example, the workers who did not accept such changes started looking for alternatives, which culminated in an organizational model called “cooperative.” Today, this model takes the shape of organizations that allow people to come together to fulfill their common needs.

The cooperative presents itself as ideal for people to work on what they do best and to be the owners of their own business, overcoming the obstacles of lack of administrative

knowledge, following market rules, as well as having greater negotiation power with suppliers and customers.

Simioni et al [5] quote a report by Lezamiz about cooperativism that had its origins in the constitution of the Rochdale Warehouse on December 22, 1844, in the Rochdale neighborhood of Manchester (England); 27 male weavers and a female weaver founded the “Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers” with the contribution of a pound from each one, so that together they can improve their economic standards, giving rise to cooperativism. Today this idea of progress has advanced, and cooperatives operate within the capitalist market as an organization that aims at the prosperity of its members, as well as their mutual contribution to achieve common goals, regardless of the economic power that each one has [5]. As Siedenberg [6] explains, the main characteristic of cooperativism comes from the sum of forces. This common force is what makes the cooperative members strong through the cooperative entity. When an individual acts alone, they, despite their financial conditions, will be at the mercy of the capitalist market and will not have the protection that an entity can offer in difficult situations.

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the following question: “Does the competence of the operational management of cooperatives make it possible for cooperative members to overcome obstacles that prevent their social and economic development?”.

To answer this question, the general goal consists in carrying out a bibliometric analysis to investigate the cooperative systems in several countries in the period between 1995 and 2020, with the focus on the economic and social development of their members. This objective seeks to address the processes of cooperative management, which differentiate them from others forms of operational management of non-cooperative organizations and thus make them ideal for the success of their cooperative members’ business.

The investigative methodology shall be applied, a scientific investigation that is ordered by metacognition, as explained by Santana, Rapecchi, and Franzolin [7]. This methodology allows the obtainment of data associated with the structure of a specific knowledge that already exists in the researcher’s cognitive structure and establishes a basis for new meanings of the researched topic. By means of the bibliometric analysis and its goal to establish a collection of publications between 1995 and 2020 concerning cooperatives in different countries, it is possible to grasp relevant and inclusive concepts and propositions.

The originality of the study lies in presenting cooperatives as organizations that can contribute to their members (who individually have difficulty in overcoming obstacles presented by the capitalist market) to successfully leverage economic and social development. It is relevant to consider that, in this research, it appears that, regardless of the place of origin of the business or segment, or even its size (small, medium, or large), cooperatives take on the same characteristics and the same “modus operandi”. In other words, they establish a balance between the social and the economic, following principles determined by any system of cooperativism. Thus, in this article, the selected research focuses on discussing the key points that highlight cooperative management in order to differentiate the modus operandi of the management system from another type of organization that is not cooperative.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The methodology used for the systematic literature review and the achievement of the state of the art was the Methodi Ordinatio, which, according to Pagani, Kovaleski, and Resende [8], encompasses nine steps, as depicted in Table 1.

According to Aria [9], three general types of research can be addressed with bibliometrics for scientific mapping, namely: (a) the identification of the knowledge base of a topic or research field and its intellectual structure; (b) the examination of research fronts (or conceptual structure) of a research topic or field; (c) the production of a social network structure of a specific scientific community. Under these concepts, the methodological procedure was broken down according to the steps presented below.

**Table 1.** Steps of the state-of-the-art process.

STEPS	PROCESS
1	Establishment of the research intention
2	Preliminary research
3	Definition of combinations, databases, and time
4	Definitive research
5	Filtering
6	Identification of Impact Factor and citations
7	Inordinato calculation
8	Article location
9	Systematic reading and analysis

Source: The authors.

### 2.1. Data Survey and Portfolio Selection

The database Elsevier Scopus was selected for the data collection, since it indexes interdisciplinary contents and encompasses more than 7000 editors, 1.7 billion cited references. In addition, it is the largest multidisciplinary database with peer review [10]. The search in the Scopus database was carried out in English on 18 May 2022.

### 2.2. Bibliometric Analysis

The research method followed a procedure of collection and analysis of data guided by a qualitative exploratory study. The qualitative method allows the quantification of the data with greater prominence, the assessment of the quality of the information, as well as the perception of social actors without the concern of measures and values.

The methodological procedures followed a script that started with the contributions that highlight cooperativism as a lever for social and economic development. This was followed by the literature review on cooperatives around the world, with a focus on the procedures adopted by the cooperative management, and on the verification of social, economic, and cultural importance of this segment for the society.

In this respect, a study script was outlined, which consisted in collecting data that highlight the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the cooperative segment. The works of well-known specialists in the area of cooperative management were consulted, as well as official websites of great scientific reputation.

The keywords and Boolean operators “Cooperative” and “Social Organization” were used in a preliminary search. Subsequently, the search was narrowed down to the period between 1995 and 2020. This timeframe may be explained by the fact that the last alteration in the principles of Cooperativism took place in 1995, at the 31st Congress of the International Cooperative Alliance in Manchester, England. Only articles from the Social Sciences were selected, as they are thematically close to the present study. Finally, the selected articles were downloaded.

In the last step, the bibliometric analysis was conducted, the content was organized in terms of compatibility with the topic in question. After the selection of the Elsevier database, the steps depicted in Figure 1 were taken.

After the establishment of exclusion and inclusion criteria, as indicated in item 4 of Figure 1, 13,050 articles were retrieved. These criteria are based on the analysis of keywords that are thematically aligned with the scope of the present work. The following procedures were adopted: According to item 5 of Figure 1, 4443 articles were selected from the Social Sciences field. This emphasis is justified, as the research object is the cooperative social organization. The titles of the thematically close articles were analyzed, and non-related ones were excluded, leaving 1294 articles. Subsequently, the abstracts of these articles were perused, leading to the exclusion of the ones that are not thematically close. 156 articles



### 3. Results and Discussion

The result obtained by reading the selected articles rendered possible a better understanding of the systems used by cooperative management, as well as the means employed in its operationalization as organizations responsible for serving the cooperative members in accordance with their wishes and needs.

Although the studies and analyses are, under a qualitative approach, linked to the operational system, the cooperative legislations existing in the different countries, as well as the cooperatives' activity areas, and the number and location of the cooperatives were not considered. When choosing the topic addressed in the researched articles, it was found that all cooperatives, regardless of their nationality, adhere to the same principles and operate in a similar way. The number of selected articles does not allow the repetition of the data presented, avoiding ineffective reading. It is understood that in the 44 selected articles, enough data were collected to pursue this research goal.

Following the refinement in the Scopus database, the following articles were selected for analysis, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Selected articles.

Authors/Publication Year		Title of the Article	Journal
1	[11]	Cooperative organizations as an engine of equitable rural economic Development	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
2	[12]	Cooperatives' proactive social responsibility in crisis time: how to behave?	REVESCO. Revista de Estudios Cooperativos
3	[13]	Development and socioeconomic environment of cooperatives in Slovenia	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
4	[14]	Worlds, words, and spaces of resistance: Democracy and social media in consumer co-ops	Organization—Sage Publishing
5	[15]	Product differentiation and cooperative governance	The Journal of Socio-Economics
6	[16]	Rethinking incentive problems in cooperative organizations	The Journal of Socio-Economics
7	[17]	Revisiting globalization challenges and opportunities in the development of cooperatives	Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics
8	[18]	Cooperativas e internacionalización: Un análisis de las 300 mayores cooperativas del mundo	CIRIEC-España, revista de economía pública, social y cooperativa
9	[19]	The impact of the economic crisis on Italian cooperatives in the industrial sector	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
10	[20]	Gestión del conocimiento y competitividad en las cooperativas con sección de ahorro y crédito. gestión: efecto en los factores clave del éxito competitivo en el sector cooperativo	CIRIEC—España. Revista de economía pública, social y cooperativa
11	[21]	Cooperative Spirit in the XXI Century European Cooperative Culture	Procedia Economics and Finance
12	[22]	Mejorando el bienestar de la sociedad a través del cooperativismo de plataforma	Revista de estudios Cooperativos. Colombia: Dalmet
13	[23]	Relevance and potential of co-operative values and principles for family business research and practice	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
14	[24]	Cooperatives and cooperative behavior in the context of family businesses	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
15	[25]	Cooperative–shareholder relations in agricultural cooperatives in Turkey	Journal of Asian Economics. Faculty of Agriculture, Trakya University

Table 2. Cont.

Authors/Publication Year		Title of the Article	Journal
16	[26]	The co-operative model as a 'living experiment in democracy'	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
17	[27]	Project-based governance framework for an agri-food cooperative	Sustainability
18	[28]	Analysis of organizational commitment in cooperatives in Ecuador	Journal of Management Development
19	[29]	Cooperativismo, políticas públicas y organizaciones sociales: Conflictividad en cooperativas promovidas por el Estado en Argentina	Psicoperspectivas
20	[30]	One for All and All for One? A New Generation of Co-operatives Emerges	Scandinavian Journal of Management Long Range Planning
21	[31]	Navigating dynamic contexts: African cooperatives as institutional bricoleurs	International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability
22	[32]	El nivel de conocimiento y la reputación social de las empresas cooperativas. El caso de la Región de Murcia. CIRIEC—España	Revista de economía pública, social y cooperativa
23	[33]	Community-Based Cooperatives: A New Business Model for the Development of Italian Inner Areas	Sustainability
24	[34]	Co-operatives as a strategic network of small firms: Case studies from Australian and French co-operatives	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
25	[35]	Cooperative games and cooperative organizations	Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, United States
26	[36]	Cooperative dynamics during the financial crisis: Evidence from Basque and Breton case studies	Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
27	[37]	Organizational principles for co-operative firms	Scandinavian Journal of Management Long Range Planning
28	[38]	Defining the co-operative difference	The Journal of Socio-Economics Saint Mary's University—Canada
29	[39]	Unifying nature of food: consumer-initiated cooperatives in Istanbul	Emerald Publishing Limited Society and Business Review
30	[40]	The meaning, importance and practice of the co-operative principles: Qualitative evidence from the Australian co-operative sector	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
31	[41]	The three pillars of the co-operative	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
32	[42]	What Are the Conflicting Tensions in an Italian Cooperative and How Do Members Manage Them?	Sustainability
33	[43]	Prácticas de RSE en cooperativas. Experiencias y resultados mediante el estudio de casos	CIRIEC—España. Journal of Public, Social Cooperative Economics
34	[44]	Co-operative resilience: The case of Malawi	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management
35	[45]	Economía social y solidaria y agroecología en cooperativas de agricultura familiar em Brasil como forma de desarrollo de una agricultura sostenible	CIRIEC-España, Revista de Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa
36	[46]	Conflict, fraud, and distrust in Ethiopian agricultural cooperatives	Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management

Table 2. Cont.

Authors/Publication Year		Title of the Article	Journal
37	[47]	O cooperativismo como instrumento para a autonomia de comunidades rurais da Amazônia: a experiência dos agricultores extrativistas do município de Lábrea, AM	Embrapa Amazônia Ocidental-Artigo em periódico indexado
38	[48]	The role of co-operatives in poverty reduction: Network perspectives	The Journal of Socio-Economics
39	[49]	Cooperatives and social capital: A theoretically-grounded approach	Revista de Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa
40	[50]	The future of cooperatives and trade unions: the relevance for the question of democratization of Society	International Review of Sociology
41	[51]	For a social theory of the company: the cooperatives of workers reconsidered	Journal of Organization and Cooperative Management
42	[52]	¿ Podría estar contribuyendo el cooperativismo a fijar la población en el territorio de Andalucía?	Journal of Public, Social and Cooperative Economy
43	[53]	Business Models of “New Cooperativism” Organizations as an Instrument of Sustainable Development Stimulation	Central European Management Journal
44	[54]	Grocery cooperatives as governing institutions in neighborhood commercial corridors	Urban Affairs Review

Source: The authors.

For a better understanding of the analysis and conclusion of the selected articles, Table 3 identifies the region where the research was carried out, the number of cooperatives chosen by the authors, as well as a representative cooperative chosen by the authors.

**Table 3.** Empirical studies on the administration of cooperatives carried out by the researched literature.

Authors/ Publication Year	Local/Search Region	Research Focus	Representativeness for Analysis and Conclusion
[12]	Spain	3 cooperatives	San Sebastian cooperatives
[11]	Canada	Agricultural cooperatives	Agricultural Cooperatives in Durham, Ontario, Canada
[13]	Slovenia	Slovenian cooperatives	Sectors in which cooperatives operate in Ljubljana
[14]	France	Canadian Cooperatives	Canada—organization formed by group of climbers
[15]	Norway	Norwegian cooperatives	Food cooperatives located in Oslo
[16]	Norway	Norwegian cooperatives	All cooperatives in Norway
[18]	Spain	300 largest worldwide	World Cooperative Monitor-International Cooperative Alliance
[19]	Italy	Italian cooperatives in the industrial sector	25,000 companies, with focus on 3000 industrial cooperatives in Trento
[20]	Colombia	126 cooperatives	Trade in Barranquilla
[21]	Romenia	Romanian Credit Cooperatives	Credit Cooperatives operating in Romania
[22]	Portugal	Technology Platform Cooperativism	Universidade de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria-
[23]	USA	Cooperatives in Duluth (Minnesota)	Minnesota Cooperatives—Duluth

Table 3. Cont.

Authors/ Publication Year	Local/Search Region	Research Focus	Representativeness for Analysis and Conclusion
[24]	USA	Cooperatives in Minnesota	University of Minnesota Duluth
[25]	Turkey	Three types of Cooperatives focused on agriculture	Tekirdag—All agricultural credit unions, agricultural sales and agricultural development cooperatives.
[26]	USA	1 Cooperative	Cooperative from Berkeley California
[27]	Spain	1 Cooperative	Region of Murcia
[28]	Ecuador	3 Cooperatives	Ecuador's rural sector
[29]	Argentina	1 Cooperative	Cooperatives of region—Tabaja
[30]	USA	Cooperative Branch of USA	All cooperatives in Kansas (USA)
[31]	Mali and Uganda	2 Cooperatives	A cooperative in Mali and another one in Uganda
[32]	Spain	Spanish Cooperatives	Region of Murcia—Southeast—interview with 321 citizens
[33]	Italy	6 Cooperatives	Cooperatives from Molise region
[34]	Australia and France	5 Small cooperatives	Australian Research Council (ARC) funded cooperatives
[35]	USA	Philadelphia Cooperatives	All cooperatives in Philadelphia
[36]	Spain and France	580 Cooperatives	France: Bretagne: 2 cooperatives Spain: Basque region: 2 cooperatives
[37]	Sweden	Cooperatives in general	All cooperatives existing in Uppsala, Sweden
[39]	Turkey	23 Cooperatives	Istanbul Cooperatives Started by Consumer embedded in alternative food systems
[40]	Australia	Australian Cooperative Sector	Bathurst—Australian cooperatives
[41]	Netherlands	2 Cooperatives	Cooperatives in Heeze-Leende, North Brabant
[42]	Italy	1 Cooperative	North of the Apulia region—one fruit and vegetable cooperative
[43]	Spain	719 Cooperatives	36 cooperatives among those registered in the International Cooperative Alliance
[44]	Malawi	Rural Cooperatives of Malawi	Malawi Cooperative Unions
[45]	Brazil	2 Cooperatives	2 cooperatives in Rio Grande do Sul's Antonio Prado and Ipê regions
[46]	Ethiopia	249 Cooperatives	4 Cooperatives of the Tigray Region
[47]	Brazil	1 Cooperative	Cooperative from Lábrea (Amazonas, Brazil)
[48]	Scotland	Cooperatives in General	Existing cooperatives in Stirling
[38]	Canada	1 Cooperative	Cooperative located in Halifax
[49]	Spain	4 Cooperatives	1 Portuguese rural village
[50]	Germany	145 countries	Sapienza University of Rome
[51]	United Kingdom	Cooperatives in General	Cooperatives in the UK
[52]	Spain	All from rural areas	Andalusia—rural area
[53]	Poland	40 Cooperatives	4 cooperatives in Warsaw
[54]	USA	3 Cooperatives	Carpenter—Neighborhood in West Mount Airy

Source: The authors.

It is noteworthy that some studies focus on cooperative organizations existing in the places where the research was carried out, concentrating the work on interviews and

evaluation of some process of cooperation. Since the majority of these studies refer to a specific number of cooperatives, the data are often presented as a case study.

Amonarriz, Landart, and Cantin [12] examined the impacts of economic crises on cooperatives at different levels and identified the contribution of Proactive Social Responsibility (PSR) to remedy the negative effects at the economic and social level of the corporate system. Their study focused on Spain and verified the construction of competitive advantage and the success of organizations based on cooperative principles. According to the authors, three factors may be considered influential: (a) economic growth and prosperity; (b) cohesion and social equality; and (c) environmental integrity and protection [12].

Despite different types of crisis that can impact the development of organizations, the authors concluded that PSR can act as a key factor in building competitive advantage and support organizational success of cooperatives, as it is a system that follows cooperative principles, as well as maintains the existing cohesion among cooperative members. They argue:

Cooperative societies as social organizations must invest their own financial resources and capabilities in the social strategy display, boosting their reputation. Therefore, they have a better strategic position due to their higher SR. The foundations of their socially responsible behavior are rooted in their specific cooperative principles. Due to these principles, cooperatives are expected to be responsible toward their members and the society in general and, at the same time, economically feasible [12].

In this line of thought, Rogera McCain relates the theory of cooperative games (an interdisciplinary research field with applications in economics, political science, management, and philosophy, covering a wide range of methods) and cooperative organizations. According to him, cooperatives can be evaluated by means of the theory of games. In this sense, he considers that the cooperative is an autonomous association of people united voluntarily to meet their economic needs and aspirations [36].

His understanding is that cooperatives, when implemented, should act as autonomous organizations made up of people with the same business affinity. They voluntarily gather to seek the fulfillment of their economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations, as well as to make it possible to be evaluated from a multidisciplinary perspective.

These findings had already been ascertained by Jerker Nilsson in 1999, when he criticized economists who are against the acceptance of the cooperatives' efficiency to manage businesses. He substantiates his criticism with three aspects: (a) the technical inefficiency; (b) the allocative inefficiency; and (c) the inefficiency of scale. The author concedes that the arguments are, indeed, convincing when it comes to the *modus operandi* and the results obtained by the cooperatives; however, he points out that cooperatives continue to prosper and grow, even in very competitive markets. If they were inefficient, they would be forced out of the market [37].

Among the several paths the cooperative management may take, Nilsson (1999) concludes emphatically that the requirement that members (cooperative members and management) are involved in the conduct of business, and, with this, the problems that arise are solved in a productive manner.

This stance is also the position defended by Pérez Sanch, Gargallo Casdtel, and Esteban Salvador. They complement the aforementioned definition by arguing that the management of cooperatives implies the adoption of the following values: mutual help, responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity, in addition to the ethical values of honesty, transparency, social responsibility, and concern for others [43].

It is observed in this position that, whenever there is some interference that can affect the business world, cooperatives are attentive not only to the economic factor, but also to the cohesion that must be based on cooperative principles so that difficulties are overcome at the economic level.

The research of Svein Ole Borgenö, in turn, delves into this topic and investigates the incentive problems that cooperatives face, listed as follows: incentive problems related to investments in cooperatives, and decision-related incentive problems. The author found

that these incentive problems become problematic according to the degree of homogeneity of the members' constituents; the value of the members' financial contribution; the contingency degree between the members' objectives; the cooperative's objectives; and the members' level of involvement [15].

The author concludes that a traditional cooperative would hardly face these problems, given its characteristic of cohesion and equality preserved in its principles. Rather, these would be problems faced by cooperatives according to the New Generation of Cooperatives (NGCs).

In a 2004 study, Borgený argues that the governance problems faced by cooperatives are solved by engaging in product development, production, and trading. With focus on agri-food marketing cooperatives, the author attributes the positive governance outcome when organizational solutions are more incisive and innovative [16].

The perennality of cooperatives is discussed in the study of Jeffrey P. Katz, and Michael A. Boland. The authors comment on the state of transition that the cooperative organization goes through after the NGCs changes. They also list several factors proposed for cooperative management by NGCs, which, in essence, aimed at increasing the line of business, even though this implied not serving all members equally—an approach that is similar to the one adopted by non-cooperative companies [30].

The authors conclude that the intended hybridization with traditional cooperatives may hardly ever occur, even if there is a market for the introduction of the NGCs in the cooperative branch. The modus operandi of traditional cooperatives cannot follow the organizational pretensions of NGCs, as many of the cooperative principles are seriously affected.

In addition to the perennality, it is interesting to underscore the issues leading to the creation of a cooperative, as described by Kayleigh Van Oorschot et al. The authors assessed the actions taken by the villagers of Sterksel, who, after the shutdown of the village's only supermarket, decided to form a cooperative in 2004 that is still active. This cooperative is run by a manager and 50 volunteers from the village. Considering that the village has around 250 inhabitants, the cooperative members represent about 60% of the entire population. The success that this cooperative has presented is described by the authors with the aid of a model that relies on three pillars: economic capacity, organizational capacity, and the goal of change. The authors stress that these pillars provide a common basis that serves all different types of cooperatives [41].

According to the instructions of the International Cooperative Alliance cooperatives—when providing services to their members (not only at economic, but also at social and environmental levels)—highlight the link between the development of social responsibility policies, and cooperative values and principles. This means that the very nature of cooperatives implies socially responsible behavior. This fact instills a sense of responsibility and commitment to maintain the harmonization of operational management [43].

Clare Gupta conducts a case study to assess the moral sense of ownership responsibility exercised by cooperatives. She concludes that cooperatives place themselves into society as living experiments in democracy, being larger than an individual, without losing their sense of ownership and participation, a description that closely echoes common conceptions of democracy [26].

Edward Oczkowski, Branka Krivokapic-Skoko, and Kay Plummer analyze the cooperative principles from an Australian perspective. The authors regard the principles of voluntary and open membership, democratic control, and economic participation of the cooperative members as fundamental to cooperative management. They also argue that there may even be some cooperatives that do not follow all these principles, but still act as important human value aspirations and serve as useful guides to achieve the desired social objectives through economic activities [40].

In a Turkish context, Özdemir undertakes an investigation of the impact on social, economic, and industrial development of the country by focusing on cooperatives in the fields of agricultural credit, agricultural sales, and agricultural development. The author

conducted this research based on administrative issues of finances, integration, training, research, legislation, and auditing. He came to the conclusion that cooperative members follow a cooperative philosophy that acts as a determining factor of cooperative success, as financial success is essential to the perception of responsibility of the cooperative members. Integration is perceived by the cooperative members in terms of its relationship with the State, thus making room for a positive attitude towards state help in matters of finance, legislation, investment projects, and other support measures, provided that there is no interference in the cooperative's management [25]. Guèlen Özdemir, in turn, analyzes how obstacles that constantly arise are overcome in cooperatives. According to the author, this is possible by means of the cooperative members' strategy of being actively engaged in trade with their cooperatives, as well as by promoting everyone's commitment to positive performance in all cooperative situations [25].

Lorea Narvaiza, Cristina Aragom Amonarriz, and Cristina Iturring Lander attribute the success of cooperative business to the fact that every cooperative organization shares a set of principles that are common to cooperativism, regardless of the organization's geographical location. According to Narvaiza et al., these principles are: (a) open voluntary membership; (b) democratic member control; (c) economic participation of the members; (d) autonomy, and independence; (e) education, training, and information; and (f) concern for communities [36].

The study by Narvaiza et al. on the success of cooperative organizations in compliance with cooperative principles explores how small and medium-sized cooperatives from different geographic configurations deal with degeneration, and how they develop dynamics in critical times. This study verified that cooperatives—as democratic organizations with a social component rooted in cooperative principles and values to meet the interest of their members—make their work effective and proactive for the survival of the entity [36]. From the perspective of these principles, the authors explain that the resilience of cooperatives to degeneration and the promotion of economic and social development of their regions and communities proceed from two dimensions that balance one another. The first one is the business dimension, which focuses on the strategic management of resources and capabilities to develop a sustainable position in an industry. Second, the social dimension of cooperatives, which aims to manage the interests of internal and external stakeholders.

Francisco Javier Perez Sanz, Ana F. Gargallo Castel, and Maria Luisa Esteban-Salvador verified the application of the criteria, values, and principles of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the management of cooperatives, so that economic results in an environment of economic crises can be achieved. The authors note that the application of three aspects of the CSR—economic, social, and environmental—combined with the cooperative's values and principles, contributes to a socially responsible management [43].

Considered essential for the management of cooperatives, these characteristics are often described in the specialized literature as important success factors. In reading the notes of Aragón Amonarriz et al. Narvaiza et al.; Bretos et al.; Martínez and Eid, among others, it is possible to observe that the authors emphasize that the management of cooperatives should maintain a balance between the economic and the social needs of a community. This way, it can benefit all members in a fair and democratic way. This contribution can take place as long as the basic principles adopted by management of cooperatives are followed [12,17,32,36].

In terms of the impact of the economic crisis on Italian cooperatives in the industrial sector, Schiara Carini and Maurizio Carpita compare these organizations with other companies at the level of employment and economic performance. The authors conclude that during the period of crisis (2008–2012), cooperatives maintained stable employment levels, unlike other companies that showed a decrease in this aspect. In terms of economic development, it is noteworthy that, while other companies remained stagnant or in loss, one out of three analyzed cooperatives planned investments during the period of crisis, while 15% of the 3000 approached cooperatives introduced innovations focused on managerial and/or commercial aspects [19].

Liliana-Aurora Constantinescu, in turn, analyzes the performance of cooperatives in the 21st century. She verifies that, since their creation centuries ago, the cooperatives have maintained their principles, thus remaining an essential aspect in the economic and social reality of the modern world. Despite changes and new economic realities, cooperatives remain positive in terms of sustainable development, as well as assume responsibility for the decisions they make. She concludes that cooperatives have the capacity to meet social and economic needs of the population in regions where they operate, adapting and striving for the region's further development [21].

Sanjay Goel carries out a study that transfers the *modus operandi* of the cooperatives to family business. The author argues that the principles and values of cooperatives, when oriented towards the management of family businesses, allow them to provide a basis for their development. By analyzing and comparing each one of the cooperative principles, the author concludes that the applicability of these principles in the administration of family businesses will overcome governance problems [23].

In a 2015 published study, Goel delves into the relationship between corporate and family business by considering that both have a thriving research and practice community as common ground. Drawing on the 2014 International Family Enterprise Research Academy (IFERA), which took place in Finland, the author points out that scholars turned to the issue of this "cooperative and family business" relationship. As a result, many articles explored the idiosyncrasies of cooperation between family businesses, thus leading to the expansion of knowledge about cooperation and a better understanding of the relevance of cooperative values, as well as the principles for family businesses [24].

Adalberto Escobar Castillo, Gabriel Velandia Pacheco, and Evaristo Navarro Manotas, in their reflections on the sampling of the researched subjects and their relation to the structures of cooperatives, point out that the result, efficiency, and proactivity of cooperativism are closely associated with specific principles and rules of a collective work. In accordance with their definition, cooperatives represent a type of business organization whose main goal is the satisfaction of collective socioeconomic needs. Therefore, it is important for each cooperative member to actively participate in the decision-making process related to the management of production, service provision, or commercialization. The authors consider that the essential feature of cooperativism is the commitment the partner feels in light of the company's competitive success, as the partner acts as the provider of tangible and intangible resources, as manager of institutional operations, and customer of the value chain [20].

Concerning the democratic procedures adopted by cooperatives, Marcos Barros and Valerie Michaud contend that the democratic function in consumer cooperatives acts as a central aspect, given their nature of ownership, control, and equal benefit to all cooperative members. Investigating members of one of the largest Canadian consumer cooperatives, they came to the conclusion that the basic principle of the cooperative's organizational structure is the preservation of rules and customs that respect the general desire of cooperative members [14].

From a theoretical perspective, Ignacio Bretos and Carmen Marcuello explore the current challenges and opportunities of cooperatives to develop successfully in the globalized economy. To this end, the authors addressed three key fields: (a) the viability of cooperatives, based on their strengths and possible weaknesses in a context of current globalization; (b) the role of these organizations in promoting local development and stability of local communities; and (c) the tensions and potentials that internationalization entails for cooperatives [17].

In another study, the authors open a debate in the field of social economy. They emphasize the internationalization of cooperatives, measured by the 300 largest cooperatives in the world between 2010 and 2013 (period of one of the most serious global economic crises). By mapping and analyzing the development and characteristics of different types of social businesses in different territories, the authors noticed that the cooperative management system is based on collective and democratic decision-making processes. They made use of

effective mechanisms to prevent failures, and considered the fact that cooperatives tend to be more present in labor-intensive sectors, with simple production processes and technologies. They are also characterized by the presence of many small-sized companies [18].

Morris Altman, conducts a comparative performance analysis between cooperatives and corporatism (made up of large farmers) and concludes that in many cases cooperatives outperform corporatists on the issue of proactivity due to the fact that the economic performance they offer is accompanied by “social welfare” of the cooperative members [11].

It was also verified in the study by Ignacio Bretos, Millán Díaz-Foncela, and Marcuello (2018) that, in terms of size, cooperatives tend to be created smaller than capitalist firms. They also present a slower growth pattern, as they aim to remain small due to their social reasons, and to maintain the level of democratic participation in the organization, and their community-oriented work [18].

On a similar note, the study by Ellen Mangnus and Mirjuan Schoonhoven-Speije in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa (southern of Sahara Desert) found out that cooperatives establish frameworks to fill institutional voids and market imperfections in rural Africa. They reason that cooperatives are considered capable of subverting current trade patterns, as well as contributing to sustainable market access for smallholder farmers. The authors outline the emergence and development of two cooperatives in different contexts: Uganda, and Mali—two territories that are home to small businesses in rural areas. Finally, the authors suggest that agricultural policies and programs turn attention to the cooperative’s ability to incorporate new institutions into socially and historically shaped local realities, rather than requiring them to conform to new rules as an ideal type of organization [31].

Alexander Borda Rodriguez and Sara Vicari in turn, assess how cooperatives in poor communities in Africa deal with the inherent problems of deprived regions. They highlight that the ability of cooperative members to deal with problems, the facility to adapt to change according to the circumstances, and their resistance to the pressure of adverse situations are acquired by means of systematic and cohesive management in the cooperative’s administration and operation [41].

Richard Simmons and Johnston Sonja comment on the efforts to develop multifunctional cooperatives that bring benefits to poor rural areas. They also stress the ability of cooperative organizations to effectively connect at the local level by means of networking and network management, thus promoting poverty reduction [48].

Kifle T. Sebhatu et al. evaluate cooperatives in poor regions of Ethiopia. The authors point out that these regions can be regarded as an efficient way for small farmers to create bargaining power, as well as to reduce poverty and to provide food security. However, the difficulties in maintaining these cooperatives in poor regions depend on the ability to maintain social capital, which, in turn, is at the core of collective action. Hence, there is a need for participation, commitment, and trust from the cooperative members [46].

Lorea Narvaiza, Cristina Aragon-Amonarriz, Cristina Iturrioz-Landart, Julie Bayle-Cordier, and Sandrine Stervinou, in turn, explore how small and medium cooperatives face degeneration, as well as how they develop dynamics of regeneration in times of crises. The theoretical assumption is questioned in accordance with the deceleration pressures that can weaken social performance of cooperatives in favor of economic performance. This degeneration process is countered by some traditional cooperatives that have developed dynamics of regeneration dynamics under the conditions of mutual trust among their members. Despite the decision adopted, it is carried out by a governance system that is maintained by the cooperatives. This system ought to be evaluated in terms of business success [36].

Tim Mazzarol, Elena Mamouni Limnios, and Ophie Reboud conducted a research on Australian and French cooperatives of small producers and how they establish themselves on the market. The cooperatives ensure access to resources, as well as help mitigate problems that arise from business organization. The authors reason that this is possible provided that the cooperative offers its members substantial value in form of access to

resources, sharing of knowledge and information, which would not be possible to acquire outside the cooperative network system [34].

Ana Tereza Herrera-Reyes, Ignacio de Los Rios Carmenado, and Jesus Martínez-Almela analyzed the governance of an agri-food cooperative that is made up of seasoned farmers with more than 40 years of experience in the sector, which, in turn, has undergone rapid market and technological changes. According to the authors, the results can be traced back to three factors: (a) the unpredictability of social and environmental circumstances; (b) the challenge for the agri-food and agribusiness sector to produce more food with guaranteed safety and respect for the environment; and (c) the provision of opportunities for diversification and value addition, given the nature and scope of the changing structure of demand. These results showed that these concepts lead to a new and effective governance model for the cooperative sector, and that the integration of knowledge and experience and working with people in small companies turn out to be a fundamental condition for more sustainable work [27].

According to the conducted studies, it was perceivable that the integration of knowledge among cooperative members is regarded as fundamental to the management of the cooperative. This fact is highlighted by Amalia Hidalgo-Fernández, Nelly Moreira Nero, Maria Hiana Llor Alcivar, and Francisco Gonzalez Santa Cruz, who evaluate this integration through emotional aspects in studies carried out in Ecuador. They call it “affective organizational commitment”, established by a measurement scale based on the one-dimensional model proposed by Michael Porter. Following Porter’s management theories, they present a human resources training strategy that allows full awareness of people’s needs, since the purpose of cooperatives is the pursuit of activities relevant to people and their needs. Against this backdrop, they must act democratically and proactively [28].

Denise Kasparian discusses these interactions in more depth. She investigates the contentious interactions between cooperatives, organizations, and the State. In her research, two conflicts were broached: the first, concerning the definition of productive activity; and the second, which pertains to the production purpose. Based on these aspects, the author explains that the interaction of these institutions contributed to an alternative production system that eliminates all forms of exploitation and domination, as well as develops the notions of social economy, solidarity, economy, and popular economy—thus arriving at the principles of cooperatives. Unlike in the capitalist model, the cooperatives act as central institutions in the solidary economy, as they have an alternative character and ideological positioning of their members. The popular economy is made up of experiences acquired within the community [29].

In this integration, the commitment of all the involved parties becomes relevant, as explained by Frederico Martínez-Carrasco Pleite, and Maged Eid (2017), who studied the level of knowledge that citizens have about the cooperative business model and its inspiring principles. They also ascertained the level of business reputation in the issues of social benefits, value development, generation of quality employment, and contribution to the development of territory. The authors concluded that, even if there is a level of fragility or vulnerability, the cooperative system generates more participative organizations in its governance and management, as well as a more equitable distribution of benefits according to the degree of contribution and achievement of each partner. According to the authors, this takes place if the cooperative principles are accordingly observed [32].

Acting as activists involved in consumer cooperatives, Beyza Oba and Zeynep Ozsoy challenge the practices of the neoliberal system and engender “counter practices” rooted in their values. Finally, they successfully develop a governance layout that is both socially transformative and inclusive [39].

Studying the municipalities of Italy, Luigi Mastronardi and Luca Romagnoli analyze the businesses of community cooperatives in order to verify the contribution of cooperatives in the growth of the internal areas of the Italian country. Emphasis is given to the studies on the importance of cooperativism as an alternative to relegate capitalism, as the management is based on the pursuit of common interests of the cooperative members, as well as on the

establishment of partnerships. The authors also point out that cooperatives contribute by introducing new practices that reduce social inequalities, provide increased social capital, and boost the process of sustainable development [33].

Franci Avsec and Jernej Syttromajer [13] in turn, studied the socioeconomic environment of Slovenian cooperatives, aiming to analyze the socioeconomic environment of Slovenian cooperatives. They seek to demonstrate their economic importance in traditional sectors, such as in agriculture. Their analysis comprises the period from 1991, when Slovenia became independent, at which point society realized that the economic problems would be solved by means of a coherent and systematic policy, which would demand great support from cooperatives. The authors come to the conclusion that the cooperatives have contributed to the country's financial, cultural, and social development [13].

Pellegrini, Annosi, Contò and Fiore investigated how members of an agricultural cooperative in the Italian region of Puglia combine organizational forms of business and social values—in particular, in terms of sustainable practices related to CO<sub>2</sub>, emissions reduction, efficient resource use, and food waste mitigation. Their study was based on the sustainable practice to meet the cooperatives' social goals [42].

Nascimento, Colado, and Muñoz, in turn, point out how Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) and Agroecology can contribute to the economic, social, ecological, and political sustainability of family farming in Brazil. The authors concluded that this junction allows the formation of business with social emphasis and economic sustainability by means of practices that organize the metabolism and the fulfillment of the needs of a territory in a sustainable and feasible way [45].

Silva, Pinheiro, and Santos report on how the organization of extractive communities in the city of Lábrea (Amazonas, Brazil) works, as well as how the cooperative was fundamental to overcome socioeconomic challenges faced by extractivists in the Amazon region. It is noteworthy that the extractivism business in Amazonas tends to be carried out by middlemen and without a systematic approach that is coherent with the social and economic needs of a community. Against this background, the results of this effort enabled the community to organize the extractive and agricultural production. In this sense, they no longer relied on middlemen, and they could carry out fair commercialization of the extractive and agricultural products, as well as facilitate access to public policies (credit, technical and market assistance) and achieve socioeconomic and political emancipation [47].

It is possible to observe the strength of cooperatives to organize the trade of natural products derived from communities that are exploited by middlemen and/or suffer from political and social challenges. Andrés Spognardi, whose study focuses on how cooperatives do not act to negatively affect the economic performance of the organization, argues that care is the most important policy unveiled by cooperativism during the formation of social capital. According to him, it is necessary for cooperative management to understand the complex and significant ways that social capital provides in collective and democratically controlled enterprise management. In this sense, social interactions among cooperative members lead to the development of networks, norms, and trust [49].

As an example of this understanding, Gyorgy Széll pursues a historical approach on the future of cooperatives and unions. Cooperatives are considered an essential part of the social economy, if their main objective is not only the production of goods but also the fulfillment of social purposes. Cooperativism achieves the status of democratic business management when it overcomes the capitalist principles [50].

Thompson amends this argument by emphatically arguing the importance of trust and leadership among cooperative members. The requirement of these factors, according to the author, makes cooperatives more competent than other companies that do not establish such a requirement [51].

Palma compares the situation of rural areas in Andalusia with urban ones, and emphasizes the social disadvantages, such as the lack of infrastructure, the lack of basic services, and the lack of economic dynamics. In short, she points out a territorial imbalance that explains the rural exodus, quite common among young men and women of all ages. Under

these conditions, the cooperatives in Andalusia have—more than commercial enterprises—demonstrated their ability to help maintain the popularity in the territory. It may also be highlighted that there is evidence of cooperativism as an opportunity to avoid the exodus of the population from rural areas, since specific policies and strategies to reduce emigration have been applied, thus leading to the promotion and creation of sustainable and quality jobs [52].

In a study conducted in Warsaw (Poland), a region where cooperatives occupy 75% of the national milk market, Pawel A. Zawiślak presents business models developed in organizations of the “new cooperativism” trend, whose application leads to a bottom-up solution of important social problems at the local level and, from a broader perspective, to the stimulus of sustainable development. In this “new cooperativism”, the author verified how the initiatives of cooperatives have come into existence to face the different socioeconomic dysfunctions that can lead to a structural crisis (associated with the lack of permanent and adequately paid work for a growing group of people, the low quality of products available in mass channels, the disruption of supply chains, community deficits, and the void of ideology). Using as examples organizations that are managed collectively, and not focused on individual profit, but rather on the objective improvement of the local community’s situation, the author points out the guidelines that seek solutions to inhibit the progression of dysfunctions and stimulate sustainable development [53].

In light of these findings, Pawel A. Zawiślak understands that the cooperative can be considered as an effective and universal catalyst that may be applied to any country, including those with the presence of oppression, hardships, and economic scarcity [53].

Following this line of thought, Martinez et al. address the opposite of this understanding. For that, he draws on the cases of cooperatives in Murcia, which had been criticized for their social reputation. The novelty of this approach focuses on the fact that even though there is a positive image of cooperatives in relation to their social benefits, their development of value, the generation of quality jobs or even their contribution to territorial development, the contrary criticism unveils the insufficient knowledge that the citizens of Murcia have about cooperativism and social economy. [32].

Moreover, the authors verified that the study of the dimensions of cooperative business reputation presents a level of fragility or vulnerability, which can only be solved through an improvement in knowledge and social awareness regarding the values the cooperative disseminates, as well as its contribution to social and economic developments. The authors draw the conclusion that there must be ways to expand the level of knowledge and social awareness to render visible the contribution of cooperative enterprises to the development of a more economic and socially responsible model that fosters the reduction of poverty, the creation of stable jobs, as well as social integration.

Andrew Zitcer and Richardson Dilworth explore the potential for cooperatives to perform governance functions in neighborhood commercial corridors (NCCs) by examining a grocery cooperative in Philadelphia that had stores in three NCCs in the city. The authors’ goal was to demonstrate the positive aspect on corridor governance, provided that the formation of a community organization is observed, in which community members organize to create actions for social change and community development. [54].

The authors argue that any cooperative organization, regardless of the country in which it is located, is a part of a set of common cooperative principles: (a) voluntary and open membership; (b) democratic member control; (c) economic participation of the members; (d) autonomy and independence; (e) education, training, and information; (f) cooperation among cooperatives; and (g) concern for the community [54].

Among the researched authors there is a consensus that, theoretically, the current challenges and opportunities for cooperatives to develop successfully in the globalizing economy should outline strategies based on difficulties and strengths, as listed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Difficulties of the cooperatives and the strategies to overcome them.

DIFFICULTIES	STRATEGIES
Underinvestment; Risk aversion; Lack of external financing; Productive inefficiency.	Participation or workers in decision making, ownership, and profits; Cooperation with other cooperatives and organizations.
Small size and weak position in the markets; Slower growth than capitalist companies.	Intercooperation among cooperatives, creation of operative co-groups, cooperation with other local agents; Education for democratic values to achieve sustainability; Growth.
Recruiting and retaining valuable managers; Lack of manager expertise in cooperative values and culture;	Training policies and support of management; Retention by means other than monetary incentives; Education and training for managers in cooperatives; Values and culture;
Slowness when making important decisions; Inefficient collective decision making.	Horizontal organizational structures; Decentralization of decision-making power; Training and education in democratic decision-making.

Source: Bretos and Marcuello [17] (p. 8).

It is necessary to identify the characteristics that make cooperative business different from the others. Two situations stand out in particular: the selection of the elements that constitute the initiative to implement a cooperative; and the rules of behavior of the cooperative members, who follow the principles and values previously defined for the membership. Based on the characteristics and objectives of cooperatives cited by Zawislak [53], it is possible to summarize them, as seen in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Ethics and values of cooperatives.

NUMBER	CHARACTERISTICS
1	They uphold values and practices of subsidiarity and community-led development.
2	They are rooted in the surrounding communities.
3	They have clear goals for the development of the local community.
4	They respond directly to crises.
5	They present bottom-up solutions that were brought up by workers and other grassroots groups to various challenges, especially those generated by the neoliberal capitalist model, such as increased precarity and unemployment, local economic depletion, growing marginalization, and environmental degradation.
6	They provide proactive, community-led alternatives to privatization of public goods and social services.
7	They follow equitable and sustainable ethics.
8	They take on ethical-political commitments that arise not from capital structures, but from everyday experiences and needs.
9	They aim at a more equitable distribution of social wealth.
10	They are inclusive, their protagonists come from or engage with broad coalitions of community members, several stakeholders, and social justice movements.
11	They promote collective projects based on social, cultural, economic, or environmental needs.
12	They are horizontal, democratic, and co-managed.
13	They promote more horizontalized work processes, more gender-sensitive divisions of labor, more directly democratic decision-making, and shared forms of co-management.

Source: Adapted from Zawislak [53].

Falcon and Perdomo ascertain another characteristic of cooperatives when they discuss the use of new technologies in businesses, as is the case of platform cooperativism, which can be a suitable way to improve social welfare in vulnerable regions. The authors consider that platform cooperativism meets the conditions to enable the participation of the residents, so that they can be actively engaged in the social and economic development of the place in which they live by adhering to cooperative actions [22].

The authors conducted a case study in a Spanish city and analyzed the process of urban rehabilitation carried out by a cooperative to benefit all members, and not just

inhabitants, as usually happens in the digital economy of other companies. They argue that the cooperative platform enables the participation of all involved, such as cooperatives, residents, and the public administration [22].

In terms of the *modus operandi* of cooperatives, Sonja Novkovic defines the differences they present in relation to the procedures of other companies. According to her, the performance of cooperatives in market economies is essentially based on cooperative values and principles, which, as explained by the economic literature, means that it is the way to internalize market externalities. It serves as a laboratory for social innovation, promotes social entrepreneurship as well as ethical business practices, and aids development [38].

The author reaches the conclusion that, due to their social component rooted in cooperative values and principles, cooperatives act as democratic organizations that serve the interest of their members. Adherence to these values and principles serves several economic, managerial, and social functions. The author also considers valid the idea of cooperatives acting as a laboratory for social innovation and social entrepreneurship, since their characteristics are based on principles such as democratic nature, governance structure, education, learning, networking, and community focus. Therefore, the author argues that cooperatives have a flat management structure, encourage participation, social learning and networking, as well as promote self-organization [38].

To sum up all the results found in the characterizations of cooperatives, it is relevant to highlight the study by Lorea Narvaiza, Cristina Aragon Amonarriz, and Cristina Iturring Lander, which is situated in the recent period of financial crisis, when traditional economic organizations were not able to meet the expectations of their stakeholders. The cooperatives turned out to be an ideal solution, and their studies focused on Spain and France enabled an overview of the cooperatives around the world. The authors define cooperatives as organizations that place importance on the participation and satisfaction of the workers, on community well-being, and sustainability, while balancing social and economic situations and maintaining a mutual character to face changes that may degenerate the business [36].

#### 4. Conclusions

By means of the literature exposed in various publications configured as a sample of the topic under study, we sought to understand the management of cooperatives in different situations that happen around the world, such as the business aspects of a cooperative, which aims, through the association of people with a common goal, to support and to back up the success of the business and through strategic actions that allow the success of the cooperative.

In a more extensive reflection on the research carried out in this paper, the role played by the cooperative reveals itself as a business model that can contribute to a solidarity economy, as well as social and democratic responsibility. To this end, from the beginning of their integration, the members of a cooperative commit themselves to the principles and social values of the organization, with mutual participation, commitment, and trust among members, all acting in and towards a socially responsible way.

In the search for an answer to the problem of the cooperatives' operational management competence, regarding the socio-economic development of the cooperative members, it was found that the reports described in the researched literature prove that the strategic elements and actions of the cooperatives' management have allowed them to overcome the obstacles brought by the constant changes that the capitalist market presents. Thus, it is established how fruitful the research was in demonstrating that cooperatives have different systems in relation to other companies, in the sense of proactively contributing to the development of society.

It was possible to notice that this development does not stop only at the economic aspect, but also at the social one, mainly in the influence that cooperativism exerts on the individual aspect of each person, considering that from its association with other people, the problems fought in a collective way and adopting decisions together and in a cohesive way, the common objectives are reached, allowing the cooperativism to transcend

the individualism of the human being. In general, it was possible to understand that cooperativism is an organization created by a group of people with common interests, who seek to perform economic activities related to the economic development and welfare of the community. This comprehension comes from the observation that cooperativism fits into a perspective that seeks to curb the excessive individualism that exists inside the human being, and that is exacerbated by the capitalist society, making the cooperative human being rethink their role in society as a collective role, where decisions or visions may prevail, but in an essentially democratic way.

The reading of the researched articles, although approached from different scopes, refers unanimously to an operational system that makes use of the effective participation of all members of the organization, so that there is a cohesion of interests that may build productive capacities.

An important meaning obtained during the research was to understand that, unlike other organizations, the cooperatives' operational system requires management that seeks to overcome the obstacles inherent to the administration of an organization, without being able to count on external help, such as the interference of the role of the state through public policies. With this, cooperatives face some limitations when compared to other organizations.

Examples of limitations are taken from these reports, such as imposing themselves on the market in a global way, since the cooperatives' operations are regional, their expansion ends up being limited. We can still observe that there are legal requirements that limit the constitution of a cooperative, for example, a cooperative of legal entities, to act together, with the cooperativist principles, aiming to institute a new market segment, or even raising financial resources, if compared to joint-stock company organizations. We can also mention the democratic imposition of the participants' decision-making process, which slows down some decisions, and is not always in line with the organizational system imposed by the quick decisions required by the market.

With these assumptions, it was found that the operational management of cooperatives differs from those used by other types of companies that are not cooperatives because they emphasize both social and economic dimensions by creating cohesive and systematic governance (preferably small and medium-sized) that integrates management knowledge with members and applies the sum of members' experiences with governance in each community accordingly.

Thus, when implemented, cooperatives propagate themselves as autonomous organizations, formed by people with the same economic activity, who come together voluntarily to meet their economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations. They form an organization that systematically assumes responsibilities, acting democratically, facing obstacles, and overcoming crises through collective and participative work.

This leads to the understanding that cooperatives can act in several branches of economic activity, and that each branch can be studied to deepen the knowledge and specificities of cooperativism.

As limitations of this study, it can be mentioned that the different branches of economic activity of cooperatives have not been investigated, as well as the impossibility of comparing the types of cooperativism, since the legislation of this segment is different in each country.

As a suggestion for future work, the branch of consumer cooperatives could be pointed out, since it was the branch that gave origin to the cooperative movement. The study of consumer cooperatives may provide interesting subsidies and expand in the future the understanding of the functioning of the social-democratic role of cooperatives, as they contribute to scientific learning on the subject of cooperativism, since it could generate benefits for the community of the area.

Finally, the conclusion of this paper, based on the literature analyzed, lies in the fact that cooperative organizations achieve their objectives regardless of the area in which they operate, because they are based on the solid principles of cooperativism. Therefore, they are organizations focused on the communities where they operate, seeking to promote a

balance of social and economic dimensions. It is inferred that the purpose of cooperativism can be situated in the context of social justice, which enables a more inclusive and egalitarian business model in society, from a group of people who follow a doctrine whose purpose is mutual benefit.

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