

Cooperatives societies as a tool for implementing the sustainable development goals¹

Las sociedades cooperativas como herramienta para la implementación de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible

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Abstract: The article demonstrates how cooperative organizations work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The discussion is essential insofar as it reflects on this relationship, contributing to discussions on the role and contributions of cooperativism in achieving the SDGs and its goals, analyzing the specificities of organization and management, as well as cooperative doctrine and theory. The text analyzes the essential characteristics of the cooperative movement and its contradictions within the dominant economic model of society. Cooperative Societies, through their social actors, guided by collective principles of solidarity, reciprocity and sharing, have a prominent place in the promotion of the SDGs, linked to a proposal of social well-being, social justice, quality of life and transformations around the world, becoming determinant in the process of awareness, transformation and cultural change of individuals so that they can rethink the action and role played in the world. The methodology is hypothetical deductive with the use of a bibliographic review.

Keywords: Cooperativism; Social welfare; Social Economy; Cooperatives Societies.

Resumen: El artículo demuestra cómo trabajan las organizaciones cooperativas para alcanzar los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS). La discusión es fundamental porque reflexiona sobre esta relación, contribuyendo a discusiones sobre el papel y las contribuciones del cooperativismo en el logro de los ODS y sus metas, analizando las especificidades de organización y gestión, así como la doctrina y la teoría cooperativa. El texto analiza las características esenciales del movimiento cooperativo y sus contradicciones dentro del modelo económico de sociedad dominante. Las Sociedades Cooperativas, a través de sus actores sociales, guiadas por principios colectivos de solidaridad, reciprocidad y compartir, tienen un lugar destacado en la promoción de los ODS, vinculados a una propuesta de bienestar social, justicia social, calidad de vida y transformaciones en torno al mundo, convirtiéndose en determinante en el proceso de toma de conciencia, transformación y cambio cultural de los individuos para que puedan repensar la acción y el papel que juegan en el mundo. La metodología es hipotética deductiva con el uso de una revisión bibliográfica.

Palabras clave: Cooperativismo; Bienestar Social; Economía Social; Sociedad Cooperativa.

Descriptores: J54, P13, Q56.

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1. Introduction

In a seminal study, Begnis, Arend and Estivaleta (2014) sought to understand the production of scientific knowledge about cooperatives, considering the publications of the *Journal of Rural Economy and Sociology*, aiming to reveal the relevance of the theme. In view of the results found, however, the authors observed that “cooperative”, “cooperativism” and “cooperation”, in the period from 2002 to 2022, represented a reduced number of scientific publications; studies with “references predominantly from the area of economics and dealing with issues related to the economic performance of cooperatives and their members” (Begniss *et al.*, 2014, pp. 99).

In order to better elucidate the issue, from the search in the SPELL database (2023a) with the terms “cooperative”, “cooperatives” and “cooperativism”, it is possible to find as results, respectively, 315, 190 and 23 articles. Certainly, in some cases, articles in common for the three terms used in the query are presented as results. The inference presented in relation to this search, however, concerns the importance and attention with which researchers from different areas of knowledge have treated the subject in the academic-scientific environment.

Although the volume of publications in the area is high—around 500 records— (SPELL, 2023a), the predominance of a multiplicity of social phenomena investigated, as well as subtopics linked to cooperatives and cooperativism, stands out in the research found, not being possible to identify a specific theme that dominates the corpus of published research. Subjects ranging from the most commonplace, such as principles and cooperative education, to the most current, such as cooperative governance and cooperative integration. It is also noticeable the existence of studies involving specific themes in the areas of Administration, Economics and Accounting applied to the reality of Cooperative Societies.

When consulting on the theme “Sustainable Development Goals” in the publications that make up the SPELL database (2023b), the system pointed to the existence of a single publication on the subject. After a similar search in Scielo (2023), four articles were found in areas related to health. Such results indicate that the discussion about the SDGs in the context of cooperativism, even though they were defined in 2015, has not yet become an object of study and investigation among researchers who are dedicated to analyzing social phenomena in cooperatives.

It is known that the duty to ensure the achievement of these objectives belongs to everyone, public managers, private companies and non-profit institutions, as well as society as a whole. In this group of responsible parties, Cooperative Societies, due to the representativeness and role they have

played in recent years (Trugilho *et al.*, 2014), become fundamental for achieving the purposes defined in the UN Assembly.

Therefore, the specificities that characterize cooperative organizations, whose fundamental assumptions are linked to factors such as responsibility, democracy, freedom and solidarity (OCB, 2018), contribute to a safer social and economic future, highlighting the ethical values of honesty, frankness, social responsibility and care for others (Annibelli, 2008).

In this context, cooperatives can be understood as central mechanisms in the process of achieving the SDGs, either by assuming practices and actions that lead to them, or even in raising awareness of the population about the importance of changing habits and behaviors so that such purposes become effective. within the established period, mainly because cooperativism can be considered as an economic and social instrument, given its emancipatory potential, as it serves as an instrument of inclusion, rescue of citizenship and, therefore, development (Annibelli, 2008).

The cooperative movement has represented a unique model of organization that goes far beyond financial returns and market growth (Alvarez Rodriguez and Menezes, 2022). These organizations seek to promote the integration of forces and the collaboration of all members of a group in order to achieve benefits and improvements in living, working and existence conditions for its members. According to Pagnussatt (2004, p. 163) cooperatives are based on principles contrary to the capitalist economic model that preaches self-performance and profitability in all its actions. In this way, they are characterized as organizational models that are aligned with the assumptions of the SDGs in meeting social demands, as well as, as discussed by Martín *et al.* (2020), to the environmental contradictions experienced by society.

Cooperatives are based, therefore, on the gathering of people who seek differentiated conditions and common benefits, guided by collective relationships and mutual help, in the search for collective growth and development (Martins and Passador, 2009), which create a unique and conducive to the emergence of actions aimed at promoting development, contemplating the human, economic, social and environmental dimensions (Bialoskorski Neto and Balieiro, 2000). Ike *et al.* (2019) highlight the scarcity of scientific research whose central purpose is to understand directional organizational actions to achieve the SDGs, contributing to the scientific advancement of knowledge in the area. How can cooperative societies contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs?

This text becomes essential as one seeks to reflect on this relationship, collaborating with discussions on the role and contributions of cooperativism in achieving the SDGs and their goals, considering their specificities in terms of organization and management. To this end, as emphasized

by Meneghetti (2011, p. 321), in an essay guidance is given not by the search for answers and true statements, but by questions that guide subjects towards deeper reflections, not considering the pretense of applications immediate consequences in theoretical studies (Richardson, 2017). Theoretical research does not have predefined structures or standardized methodological procedures (Meneghetti, 2011). they are guided by the intention of proposing new theoretical arrangements capable of contributing to the understanding of certain social phenomena (Richardson, 2017), considering that truths, taken for granted, are questioned (Meneghetti, 2011). As Boava, Macedo and Sette (2020) state, the essay enables the liberation of thought, in the search for the mysteries and myths that populate the minds of researchers.

Therefore, the present theoretical essay is structured in six sections, namely: 1. Initially, the introduction is discussed, in which general elements are presented that characterize the present study proposal, with the research problem and the central objective of the study ; 2. Then there are the theoretical reflections linked to the sustainable development objectives —SDGs—, delimiting their emergence and proposal; 3. It starts with a debate about the social, economic, political and environmental context of the genesis of the sustainable development objectives; 4. Seeking to answer the research question, there is a discussion about the nature of cooperative organizations and the objectives of sustainable development; 5. Finally, the final considerations with a research agenda seeking to contribute to the advancement of theoretical knowledge on the subject; and 6. the references used in the construction of the work.

2. Emergency of the sustainable development goals

Although geographically separated, the world's nations have experienced similar problems and contradictions (Buralli *et al.*, 2018) as there are issues that directly or indirectly affect the health and quality of life of our population. In this context, thinking about solving a series of problems and conflicts experienced by different nations around the world would have led world leaders to collectively reflect on social, economic, political and environmental demands. This movement represents everyone's concern for the future of the planet and, consequently, for the future of the next generations.

The result of this process was the delimitation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals —SDGs—, linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by the UN summit in September 2015, being inserted, in fact, in the debates and actions of the countries from January 2016 (UN, 2018).

Unlike the Millennium Development Goals —MDGs—, the SDGs seek to broaden the focus of application and the potential for eradicating poverty in the world (Martín *et al.*, 2020), requiring public managers, at the municipal, state and federal levels, to in all countries, a proactive posture in the planning and application of strategies that guarantee the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the planet; measures that promote alignment between the purposes of economic growth and respect for man and nature (UN, 2018).

The 17 SDGs, accompanied by their 169 goals, came to represent an agenda of collective commitments by nations around the world with social, economic and environmental aspects that are decisive for building a more egalitarian, peaceful and environmentally balanced world; agenda that delimits consistent guidelines for public policies of rulers in the next two decades, integrating local, regional, national and international actions (Martín *et al.*, 2020). These measures are proposed with the perspective of leading humanity to results capable of generating well-being, social justice and better living conditions for populations around the world (Nakamura *et al.*, 2019), minimizing contradictions experienced by societies in these days. today, as well as solving problems for future generations.

The SDGs were thus defined with the aim of promoting human dignity and prosperity, safeguarding the Earth's vital biophysics as well as ecosystem processes and services (Nilsson *et al.*, 2019). Reading the purposes outlined by the SDGs makes it possible to identify the complexity that involves their effective achievement, essentially due to the possibility of involvement and joint action by all nations, but, mainly, due to the need for robust financial investments, in the next 15 years, so that that the basic supports are built to enable the achievement of goals equally on all continents (Szomszor, 2019).

In this context, treated as indivisible purposes and mechanisms of social promotion, the challenging task around the SDGs tends to demand not only a discourse inclined to comply with the impositions determined by international agencies, or to guarantee an unblemished public image before public opinion; it is characterized as a dynamic agenda, which emerges from a change in the attitude of the rulers to outline strategies and define mechanisms that can contribute to the sustainability of the results obtained with the achievement of the outlined objectives (Costa, 2018; Nilsson *et al.*, 2019, Menezes and Cañedo Villarreal, 2022).

Likewise, political structures need realignment so that future managers are able to understand the importance of the SDGs, maintaining and intensifying a political action capable of meeting the purposes shared by the populations (Costa, 2018). In this sense, the challenges surrounding the SDGs point to the promotion of public governance that responsibly meets

the important social, economic and environmental demands of the planet. Nakamura *et al.* (2019) reinforce that the efficient and conscious application of resources, as well as knowledge linked to significant research and innovations, would represent the basis for the formation of groups and institutions capable of carrying out the actions outlined by the objectives.

Finally, it is important to discuss, still in the atmosphere of the SDGs, the monitoring and evaluation procedures (Costa, 2018) of the results obtained with the defined actions and the changes carried out by the social actors involved in the execution; verification criteria that allow those responsible to reflect on the effectiveness of their contributions, rethinking the measures adopted as well as the role of public institutions in this process.

Establishing criteria, mechanisms, roles and responsibilities, as well as necessary resources, becomes a central challenge in promoting the SDGs. Nakamura *et al.* (2019) and Szomszor (2019) defend, for this, the importance of science in the definition of actions that can effectively contribute to the solution of the social, economic and environmental contradictions prevailing in the world today; inconsistencies that accompanied the development of society, causing, due to the dimensions reached, precarious living conditions for a large portion of the world's population.

3. Genesis context of the Sustainable Development Goals

The society for which the SDGs were established is the result of a historical process of social, political, environmental and economic transformations. Hobsbawm (1977) establishes that the modernization of society has driven the departure of men from rural areas to urban areas. Until then inserted in a context of production and creation for self-sustenance, man began to perform standardized activities for industrial production, organized by the holders of capital (Menezes, 2022).

Thus, the transposition of the rural environment to the urban environment, dominated by mass industrial activities, based on the exploitation of salaried labor, gave rise to a market logic. From the point of view of capitalist perception, this process guaranteed the formation of the market for the supply of labor necessary for industrial activities and for the consumer market for goods resulting from the production process (Braverman, 1981; Harvey, 2007).

Thus, a social restructuring is perceived in which the collective and solidary practices of production, exchange and sharing, essential in the configuration of associated human life, were replaced by instrumental action; dynamic that assumes not only social practices in the context of organizations, but invades people's daily lives, conducting relationships based on marketing principles (Guerreiro Ramos, 1989). In the Market Society, the mean-

ing of predominant social action was linked to the utilitarian calculation of consequences, in which the individual acts due to predominantly economic results, whose individual financial gain, regardless of the impacts caused by their actions, becomes the orientation of behavior human.

Polanyi (2000) and Santos (2010) emphasize that the transformations brought about by the promises of progress do not materialize for the majority of the population, and are aggravated by the surrender of public agents to the individualistic private purposes of organizations. Thus, with the same characteristics of free land enclosures, the utilitarian action of capital in conducting an appropriation of State mechanisms can be seen. These are seen as instruments for the social promotion of the neediest population, which starts to serve the interests of capital, subverting itself to the dominant logic of the Market Society.

In this way, the worsening polarization between center and periphery can be seen with the surrender of public power to the assumptions of the capitalist system. Government institutions, whose function would be to provide the population with adequate living conditions, began to act in line with the individual interests of corporations. Social demands are placed in the background because they do not contribute to the achievement of these purposes. The inversion of values with the action of the State is accentuated, clashing with its guiding principles and promoting a capable minority to the detriment of a limited majority; mechanism delimited by Santos (2010) as a top-down political process, which disregards the interests and demands of the population, replacing the collective with the individual.

Relying, however, on the reflections of Polanyi (2000), it is not denied that change is something inevitable for a society; What is discussed is the role of government institutions in this transformation process, which often ends up restricting the rights of individuals with lower purchasing power because they are not active characters in the conduct of changes, relegated to supporting a social system whose domain tends to be isolated groups.

As a result of changes in society, the belief that prosperous economic growth would support the assumptions of unrestricted development, in terms of regions or individuals, generating collective prosperity, proved to be limited. Due to this difficulty, this process has been gradually questioned as it expands and contradictions of a social, economic, political, cultural and environmental order are highlighted (Sachs, 1998).

3.1. *Limits and Contradictions of the Developmental Model of Growth*

The developmental model, propagated by the society's modernization process and initiated by the capitalist production system, was not capable

of guaranteeing the promised prosperity. It actually resulted, as discussed by Esteva and Prakash (1998) and Santos (2010), in a series of problems and conflicts experienced by people who were relegated to a peripheral context of life. As highlighted by Sachs (1997, p. 214) history has played a cruel trick on us; play in the sense of representing a fallacy, with immeasurable negative results, as Sachs (1997, p. 216) states: the world was engulfed by a profound social crisis, aggravated by environmental disruption.

The process of social collapse had man as the main actor in the role of defending and promoting the developmental model of growth, whether as a dominant character, holder of capital, or in the dominated group, experiencing the experience of exploited and socially and economically excluded workers (Sachs, 1997).

The search for growth and the promotion of economic progress ended up disrupting the well-being of different communities, accentuating social injustices. The way of life, based on traditional knowledge, transmitted over the years, was replaced by an individualistic and purely utilitarian behavior of individuals (Polanyi, 2000); progress understood as a gear of domination of the being and its conscience, reinforcing the alienation links of the majority of society to the detriment of the holders of capital (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1985).

Hobsbawm (1988) emphasizes that with the industrialization process, the world was divided into two poles: the regions that experienced growth, development and prosperity, mainly financial; and peripheral territories, positioned on the margins of commercial centers. Peripheral regions, increasingly common in the world, also became the “stage” for the negative effects of capitalist proposals. A large part of the population, in these contexts, saw itself limited in terms of health, education, food, housing, basic sanitation and leisure. Although a portion was directly linked to this Market Society, for playing the role of a worker in the process, it is clear that some were not even able to put into practice the ills of consumerism.

Complementarily, Hobsbawm (1996) points out that, although his speech emphasizes the possibility of progress for all humanity, reserving for individuals a prosperity never experienced before, the assumptions of the capitalist system led society to a process of domination. Most of the world's population became victims of those whose economic, technological and consequently military superiority was uncontested and seemed indestructible (Hobsbawm, 1996).

In addition to not fulfilling the promises of prosperity, which they have defended over the years, individualist economic practices, assumed by the Market Society from the mid-twentieth century, have faced difficulties in creating jobs for all individuals who need to work (Guerreiro Ramos, 1989). Guerreiro Ramos (1989, p. 13) states that the development of pro-

ductive forces has become the logic of human life in general. Even the private subjectivity of the individual fell prisoner of instrumental rationality. Inequalities in peripheral spaces become more acute due to the apprehension and control of information by those dominant social actors, in view of their vested interests, alien to the aspirations of the community.

Considering the perceived dysfunctionalities, as Vizeu, Meneghetti and Seifert (2012) point out, the capitalist production system reproduces itself by exploiting individuals, destroying natural conditions and eliminating the possibilities that human relations are in fact the centrality of the civilizing process. The dominance of information by a small group of people or companies determines that the periphery of the capitalist system ends up becoming even more peripheral, either because it does not fully have the new means of production, or because it escapes the possibility of control (Santos, 2010).

The indiscriminate use of natural resources, in the perception of researchers and members of society in general, normally excluded, was presented as one of the main fallacies of development. In an attempt to reaffirm their foundations, however, social actors, immersed in the belief in the potential of development assumptions, adopt premises about ecological thinking in order to institute the ideas of «sustainable development» as an instrument to justify and reaffirm their own development (Esteva and Prakash, 1998).

The belief that progress and development would bring prosperity to all, institutionalized and legitimized by an ideological discourse of the capitalist system, built a Market Society anchored in a consumption structure where huge masses of people are induced to believe that they want (and therefore, should buy) what they do not need (Guerreiro Ramos, 1989).

As stated by Adorno and Horkheimer (1985, pp. 104), «progress literally separates people», being responsible for the making of a series of instruments and practices that promoted the weakening of social relations, distancing people and, thus, massifying social alienation; system that, based on communication mechanisms, make products and services attractive to consumers, so that they consume without any possibility of questioning or reflecting on the real need for what they are purchasing.

Thus, the inversion of values in society, which had replaced its logic of collective sharing for excessive individualistic behavior, the basis of market society, resulted in a context mitigated by social, economic and environmental conflicts (Esteva and Prakash, 1998), responsible for the associated devastation of human life, imposing a significant collapse on the dignity of civilization.

Finally, Santos (2010) points out that the abandonment of principles of solidarity ended up dividing the coexistence between men and the re-

sponsibility of each one towards the others. Esteva and Prakash (1998) pointed out that the very limits that determine the proposals for development and growth, linked to the mechanisms of industrialization of capital, have become the driving force behind debates and reflections on mechanisms capable of rebuilding or regaining a more egalitarian society, with better living conditions, today and tomorrow; movement in which people, public institutions and private organizations become central actors in a critical-reflexive practice.

4. Nature of cooperatives and the Sustainable Development Goals

The emergence of the cooperative movement in the world historically coincides with a sharp manifestation of contradictions in the capitalist production system (Benecke, 1980; Benevides Pinho, 1982; Menezes, 2022; Santos, 2004; Altman, 2009). In 1844, with the genesis of the first cooperative in the world, a group of workers, indignant with the bad situations experienced in the daily work and the terrible conditions of survival of countless families of the great urban centers, made it clear, for the holders of capital and public managers, what changes were necessary to reduce the impacts generated by mass production and consumption (Noronha *et al.*, 1976; Benevides Pinho, 1982; Abrantes, 2004).

The basis of this movement of indignation and insurgency within a context dominated by hegemonic practices of organization and management of production, which still invaded people's behavior in their social context, was the principle of solidarity (Benevides Pinho, 1982). Their precursors sought to position themselves against the dictates of individualism proposed by the industrialists, who increased their wealth and social representation due to the exploitation of workers and the marginalization of the less favored in society (Noronha *et al.*, 1976).

The union of workers around a new model of organization, which presupposes the collective subject, whether in the work context or in the social context, as the essence of the action, manifests itself as a movement in defense of the social and environmental interests of the population. The genesis of cooperatives is aligned with the debates and reflections of political and social scientists at the time, who were already engaged in questioning, understanding and proposing solutions for the contradictions arising from market society (Benecke, 1980; Benevides Pinho, 1982).

Principles such as equality, solidarity and reciprocity, fundamental in discussions around the perspective of a substantive rationality, are now evidenced by the discourse of promoters of the cooperative movement, with

the aim of leading people to re-signify their ideological perceptions and their social practices, moving them away from the principles of an instrumental rationality, foundation of the capitalist context (Benecke, 1980). Through mutual help and cooperation, the primacy of human values is allowed to be rescued in society to the detriment of monetary postulates (Ratner, 2009).

In this sense, having cooperation as its nature, the cooperative movement seeks to resolve not only the social, economic and environmental issues of its direct participants, but to enable the results arising from its actions to be perceived by all humanity (Benecke, 1980; Abrantes, 2004). The intention of the precursors can be understood as an attempt, through equitable work and income, to contribute to the construction of a fairer and more balanced society in social and environmental terms; a society in which the contradictions perceived at the time are reduced; a society in which, as emphasized by Santos (2010), the polarization between center and periphery was mitigated.

Thus, seeking to materialize its purposes and strengthen the movement's diffusion in the edges of society, its creators promulgated their ideas in the Cooperative Principles (Noronha *et al.*, 1976; Benevides Pinho, 1982; Abrantes, 2004); elements that began to give meaning to the postulates of cooperativism, assuming the role of flagship of cooperative organizations around the world; principles that would have been thought from the general context of society.

According to the description, the cooperative principles represent the assumptions of the movement (Noronha *et al.*, 1976; Abrantes, 2004), conceived from the collective interests of marginalized groups in the context of market society, with the aim of resolving contradictions and injustices (Benecke, 1980) evident in a system that is based on individualism, mass production, exacerbated consumerism, exploitation of labor, the indiscriminate use of nature and the reproduction of capital that is in the hands of small parts of society.

It is common in the definition of descriptors of cooperative principles theoretical categories such as cooperation, transformation and balance in the social, economic and environmental dimensions. The perspective of cooperation translates into the promotion of collective action that seeks to meet the common interests of the members of the cooperative; action that involves not only everyday practice, but also joint decisions that value the essence of the human being in the daily life of cooperativism (Ratner, 2009; Flecha and Cruz, 2011).

By promoting the rescue of human values linked to a collective social dimension, therefore, the perceived results translate into significant potential for changes in four significant dimensions: social, ecological,

health and peace; transformations that begin within the cooperative organization and reverberate to the surrounding community and, by gaining potential, generate benefits for the lives of people around the world (Ratner, 2009).

In this process, what ensures harmony between individual interests and collective needs concerns the foundation of balance. Cooperatives act in defense of respect for human values and the limits imposed by nature, and balance the presuppositions of conscious production and consumption, of growth and degrowth, of the conscious use of natural resources and the economic conditioned to the social; dichotomies that translate the action into movement to promote social well-being and adequate conditions for survival for all, thus assuming a central role in the process of emancipation of the marginalized in society (Bhowmik and Sarker, 2002).

Thus, an interpretation of the cooperative movement is attributed, from a sociopolitical and ideological perspective, which delimits its non-economic nature (Benecke, 1980) which has revealed the potential contribution of such organizations to the achievement of the purposes established by the Objectives of Sustainable Development —SDG. These expectations, according to Benecke (1980, p. 111), can be traced in two integrated central axes: i) cooperatives are expected to change the economic and social behavior of the population; and ii) due to the change in attitude, cooperatives are able to drive greater efficiency at the macroeconomic and social level. Such attributes represent historical principles of the cooperative movement capable of meeting the assumptions pointed out by Ike *et al.* (2019) as essential for the promotion of the SDGs, mechanisms, policies and education programs, as well as strong institutions, whether public, private or non-governmental.

Benecke (1980) also pointed out that education, aligned with cooperative assumptions, represents a possible path, assumed by non-governmental organizations, governments and private companies, guided by a substantive behavior for a change in society's attitude, aiming to reduce differences and conflicts perceived with social polarization, massified by individualistic attitudes towards economic development and organizational growth.

Three benefits are converging in a context of promoting an education linked to the postulates of cooperative doctrine and philosophy, as highlighted by Benecke (1980, pp. 112): i) Education to increase the general cultural level; ii) Education of the population for solidarity; and iii) Education to strengthen democratic awareness.

Education, anchored by cooperative principles, values and virtues, contributes to the rescue of marginalized populations that are excluded from the social and economic context due to the democratization of knowledge

and information that lead to the empowerment of the individual in a way that he is able to build an awareness critical-reflexive, thinking about their daily lives and their social context. The subject paves, therefore, social relations instituted of solidarity and devoid of an individualist thought of ambition, capable of generating changes in the social structure of the different nations of the world to the point of minimizing the current problems faced by society (Benecke, 1980).

Although the Cooperative Organizations were relegated to invisibility during the movements of reflection and delimitation of the SDGs, due to prejudice and the belief that the reference context of the cooperative movement is delimited by local social practices, not being able to attribute results in the dimensions national and international (ACI; ILO, 2019), the collective and solidary nature of Cooperative Organizations dismantles such arguments and assigns them a preponderant role in the process of discussion and promotion of the SDGs in the world (Gouveia, 2016).

Mainly, because Cooperative Organizations conduct their practical actions linked to a doctrine and philosophy that value social-economic and environmental balance, respecting socially shared human values (ACI; ILO, 2019). The cooperatives' multiple capacity for representation and action can be further reinforced by acting in 13 different branches of the economy, namely: i) Agriculture; ii) Consumption; iii) Credit; iv) Infrastructure; v) Housing; vi) Health; vii) Work, Production of Goods and Services; viii) Educational; ix) Special; x) Mineral; xi) Production; xii) Tourism and Leisure; and xiii) Transport (OCB, 2019), which worldwide means an important instrument of social transformation not only for members, but also for the different social enclaves in which cooperatives are inserted.

The amount of 13 branches, with all their central and singular cooperatives, as well as cooperative members and employees in different regions of the country, form a range of daily practices that, guided by principles of solidarity, mutual aid and assumptions of uniting people to a common goal, are established as the driving force behind the SDGs in society. Certain precautions, however, must be taken in order not to adopt and generalize the discourse of competences of cooperative organizations, since, in general terms, the 17 SDGs have relevant adherence to the purposes of action of cooperatives. It is essential to ensure the sustainability of actions around the SDGs, seeking the role of cooperatives from the breakdown of these objectives into their respective goals and indicators (Gouveia, 2016).

Therefore, it is essential to recognize that cooperatives adhere directly to some thematic axes of the SDGs, such as: i) ensuring quality

inclusive and equitable education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all; ii) achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls; iii) promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; iv) build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; v) ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns; vi) take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; and vii) protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

In the others, the positioning is done indirectly, namely: i) ending poverty in all its forms, everywhere; ii) end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture; iii) ensure a healthy life and promote well-being for all, at all ages; iv) ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; v) ensure reliable, sustainable, modern and affordable access to energy for all; vi) reduce inequality within and between countries; vii) make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; viii) conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; ix) promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and x) strengthen the means of delivery and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

This division into two axes, direct and indirect adherence, cannot be understood as a partial fulfillment of the SDGs. Admittedly, cooperative organizations, considering the multiple activities carried out, as well as the different sectors of the economy in which they are inserted, have the competence to contribute significantly to the achievement of the SDGs proposed by the UN; adherence that is strengthened with joint actions between organizational actors capable of abandoning competition assumptions and assuming cooperation as an essential principle for promoting a more harmonious world (Menezes and Cañedo Villarreal, 2022).

Joint actions, however, become essential. Considering the complexity surrounding the SDGs, Ike *et al.* (2019) highlights that organizations in the private sector may experience difficulties in service and effectiveness in all axes. It is essential, in this context, to join efforts with other institutions, companies and governments to enhance the possible results and ensure that the objectives outlined are met. This makes it possible to expand cooperation proposals beyond cooperative bound-

aries, encouraging the establishment of networks and inter-organizational relationships between institutional actors, public or private, inclined to promote attitudes and behaviors linked to the SDGs. Partnerships beyond inter-cooperation, already common in the context of cooperative organizations, would contribute to the establishment of a collective awareness movement of representatives of society capable of ensuring that the achievement of the SDGs is sustainable and that its results are perceived in the long term. As highlighted by Rendtorff (2019), there is articulation mediated by the strengthening of public-private partnerships.

In this context, Gouveia (2016) discusses possible strategic mechanisms from which cooperatives can direct their actions and, thus, promote those platforms assumed as priorities in the context of the SDGs. To this end, experiences must be shared between individual cooperatives, central or federations and confederations, and between cooperatives and private companies and government institutions, so that information can make the mechanisms used more efficient. By disclosing the results of successes obtained, cooperatives can also attract the attention of new partners, as well as reinforce the commitment of those involved.

Also noteworthy is the role of cooperativism in the political context, collaborating in the definition of public policies aligned with the purposes of the SDGs, acting to convince public managers about the importance of measures and actions that are conditioned to collectivist and solidary purposes, and fighting for the interests and needs of disadvantaged or marginalized groups in society; action that should be based on building strategic alliances at different levels and contexts to promote mutual help in an institutional dimension (Gouveia, 2016). In this sense, the actors participating in networks and inter-organizational relationships would have their internal strategic purposes as well as a joint strategic agenda.

Thus, with a view to encouraging cooperative action in achieving the SDGs, four action platforms were delimited, established as the central north of cooperative organizations in the world for the coming years until the 2030 agenda. and essential services for the entire population; ii) eradication of poverty in all senses and social contexts; iii) protection of the environment and the dominant biodiversity in nature; and iv) building a healthier, more accessible and solid food system (ACI, 2019).

Finally, the ICA (2019) outlines a discussion around essential recommendations that would shed light on the potential contribution of the cooperative movement to the achievement of the purposes established by the SDGs, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Recommendations for approximation between cooperatives and the SDGs

Recommendation	Description
International Recognition	The United Nations should recognize the role of cooperatives in achieving sustainable development, including them in indicators, targets and financing mechanisms for the Sustainable Development Goals.
Proactivity of Cooperative Organizations	Cooperatives must be proactive and intervene in debates about the post-2015 development agenda for all levels (local, national, regional and international) to ensure the possibility to share their experiences in achieving sustainable development.
Representation and Defense of Cooperative System	Co-operative organizations, national, regional and international, should improve their sector representation and advocacy functions, to gain greater presence and recognition of the co-operative point of view in the post-2015 development agenda and in international policy debates in general.

Source: ACI (2019, p. 17).

The recommendations highlighted above are intended to reinforce the importance of the nature of cooperativism around the world; nature governed by assumptions of mutual help, self-management, respect for human values, conscious use of natural resources and cooperation, as well as values of solidarity, responsibility, democracy and equality.

These elements configure a unique identity for cooperatives and are in line with the purposes that gave rise to the SDGs at the UN, as it aims to guarantee the autonomy and emancipation of people and the protection of nature, making the world a better and more sustainable environment. receptive to future generations. It is a space capable of promoting balance between social, economic and environmental dimensions, essential for promoting sustainability principles in different contexts and different human relationships.

5. Final considerations

Based on a theoretical essay based on the nature of cooperative organizations and on the elements that characterize the Sustainable Development

Goals —SDGs—, without intending to exhaust the scientific possibilities around the subject, but rather, calling for academic debate, the present study assumed the following question as a guiding question for the debate: How can cooperative organizations contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals —SDGs? It was guided by a perspective that the world is attributed a set of contradictions that have, in a significant way, invaded different social enclaves and implied transformations in human relations.

In prehistory, collective action already manifested itself as essential for the survival of families and communities, in view of the difficulties encountered in nature when in need of protection and food. Subsequently, cooperation is reinforced by the union of peoples around the world due to wars and invasions of their territories, or even for the expansion of their domains to meet population growth. Finally, cooperation gains contours of human values, and, in the context of the capitalist movement of domination, it grows with groups that would have been excluded and kept on the margins of market society.

Cooperatives emerged in the atmosphere of collective actions with the attribution of enhancing better living and working conditions for families that find themselves in vulnerable and marginalized situations as a result of the rise and consolidation of the dominant and hegemonic production system in different times and social contexts; system whose action is determined by the behavior pattern of individuals linked to their activities.

At the same time, nowadays, around a discourse of unity and defense of common interests, the Sustainable Development Goals —SDGs— were proclaimed, with the attribution of improving people's quality of life and protecting the planet's biodiversity. The achievement of the SDGs, so that their results are perceived by all nations, requires the union of people, governments, non-governmental institutions and private companies. It is important to recognize the SDGs as an instrument for economic development and regeneration, contributing to economic empowerment and social and political change (Vedovato and Menezes, 2018).

In this sense, epistemologically, the construction and institution movement of the SDGs, their purposes and goals, institutes a different world configuration from the perceptions arising from the capitalist system of production, which, until then, from a discourse of generation and distribution of wealth and conquests, determined its supremacy as the only way capable of organizing society and giving meaning to the different social roles in force.

Naturally, the recognition of the existence of contradictions in society is exposed, which has as its generating factor the predominant instrumentality in the form of social organization instituted by the genesis of the

capitalist system of production. Assumptions, therefore, of development, growth and prosperity become scourges of a way of life whose results accentuated the dichotomy between center and periphery.

The institution of two poles in the world aggravated the marginalization of social actors, deprived of capital goods due to the appreciation of those who, economically active, become the system's reproduction gear. Such marginalization would culminate in the effervescence of social, economic and environmental problems that led to the questioning of the validity and the real contributions of the hegemonic and dominant economic model. Thus, based on a collective movement of critical reflection, the veracity of the pillars that support its reproduction is placed under suspicion.

In this way, the priorities established by the SDGs and their goals demand a change of attitude from the different social actors and not only the institution of measures and the fulfillment of social, economic and environmental requirements. It is expected that the transformations will enable changes in the principles and values that condition human perception and action in a context of social sharing; context in which, as a reference for human behavior, it is dominated by an attribution of the collective to the detriment of the individual.

Finally, considering the attributes arising from the nature of the cooperative movement, as well as the obvious manifestation of contradictions in the dominant and hegemonic model of society, cooperatives, through their social actors, assume a prominent role in promoting the SDGs in the world. They become decisive both in the definition of short, medium and long-term actions and strategies that can contribute to the generation of social, economic and political benefits for both the population and for a process of awareness, transformation and cultural change of individuals, so that they can rethink action and the role played in the world.

Reinforcing the movement already instituted by Begnis, Arend and Estivalet (2014) about the need to advance research on cooperatives, cooperativism and cooperation, to consolidate the field in Brazil, at the end of the theoretical reflections promoted with the present essay, proposals are instituted to future research. Due to the incipient nature of the subject in the academic context, there is little research dedicated to understanding the nuances that involve cooperative organizations and the SDGs. Even so, scientific reflection becomes important because it contributes to understanding the assumptions, the form of organization and management, as well as the possible implications and limitations surrounding the promotion of the SDGs. Aiming to contribute to this scientific movement, some steps are proposed below that can lead to the maturation of knowledge in the field of studies:

1. understand the historical context of the genesis of the Sustainable Development Goals —SDG—, leading to an understanding of the principles and values defended by their creators, as well as the contradictions of the dominant system that gave meaning to the movement of critical reflection of world leaders. Studying the history of this process makes it possible to identify the potential alignment of cooperative doctrine and philosophy, linked to the assumptions of a bottom-up policy, as discussed by Santos (2010), with the framework of goals listed by the SDGs;
2. establish parameters and indicators for analysis and evaluation of the dissemination of the SDGs in society, assessing the perception of people and organizations about the potential for transformation and solution of the social, economic and environmental problems of the SDGs, as well as the role of cooperatives in this dynamic, and , also, the results obtained with the initial actions conducted by the countries involved; criteria that can help adjust measures and behaviors in the context of promoting the SDGs, also allowing for the sharing of experiences that bring greater effectiveness to them;
3. verify the possible implications of the intercooperation movement in the context of the cooperative system for the effective achievement of the SDGs; analyzing the effectiveness of the alignment between central and individual cooperatives in the process of planning future actions that can guarantee the balance between economic growth and sustainable development;
4. mapping the relationships and partnerships instituted with the purpose of consolidating the SDGs, assessing the role of the participating actors; the exchange and sharing of resources, knowledge and skills; gains and benefits, individual and collective, arising from network action; as well as the role of governance in managing the purposes and mechanisms for establishing strategies and applying resources at the level of interorganizational relationships, seeking to ensure the sustainability of the results obtained; and
5. study the difficulties and barriers faced by the idealizers for the dissemination, development and consolidation of the SDGs in society, so that public managers, non-governmental institutions and private companies can position themselves and seek solutions to ensure implementation of the established purposes. Understanding the limiting factors can help clarify the relationship between the SDGs and the cultural factors of a society, as well as the contributions of the cooperative movement in intermediation, approximation and adherence between both.

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