

## Cooperatives, public administration and local development: notes in pursuit of its necessary articulation

## Cooperativas, administración pública y desarrollo local: apuntes en pos de su necesaria articulación



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Cooperatives develop their management in order to carry out functions that go beyond the narrow limits of economic and business activity, because thanks to their social character, they fulfil a service purpose that should not be confused with traditional mercantile profit. This idea, which connects with the satisfaction of social needs, sustains the conviction that "cooperatives are private institutions of public utility" (Gascón, 1955), which can naturally function as "agents of local development" (Coque, 2003) linked to Municipal Administrations.

In the last decades, the cooperatives have demonstrated -even- a special vocation to supply the gradual withdrawal of the State in its functions of provision of social services, using the endogenous resources required to satisfy the local needs (Coque, 2003). In this way, public services have constituted an area of expansion for the action of these associative forms, with the addition that -according to their nature- they carry out a democratic, transparent and responsible management.

In this sense, it is worth pointing out that the European doctrine coined the term

«régies coopérative», «public cooperatives» or «cooperative administrations» to refer to entities that provide public services, which arise from a decision of the public authority and whose associate members are -almost solely- legal persons under Public Law (Lambert, 1975; Lavergne, 1973). But these entities, which more than cooperatives themselves are associative forms of Public Law (Sayagués, 1974; Virga, 1983; Zanobini, 1954), should not be confused with the so-called "public service cooperatives", born of the free will of individuals, who maintain with it the double bond of member-users to self-supply services such as electricity, telephony, drinking water, paving, etc. (Cassage, 1986; Cracogna, 1992; Halperín, 1986).

In Cuba, the first constitutional regulation regarding cooperatives that appears in the 1940 Constitution provides a good example to illustrate how the legal regulation of cooperatives can bring them closer to the municipality. In this sense, Title Fifteen: "Of the Municipal Regime"; Section One: "General Provisions"; in its article 213, it determines that: "It corresponds especially to the Municipal

Government: c) (...) to tend to the establishment of production and consumption cooperatives (...) with character of public service".

This provision inserted the cooperatives in the local regime, turning them into an entity at the service of the community that the Municipal Government was to promote and support in its different variants. This demonstrated the constituent's awareness of the value of the figure to achieve initiatives and social participation in confronting and solving the problems of the locality.

For its part, the Socialist Constitution of 1976 presented a set of limitations that did not contribute to these associative forms expanding beyond the agricultural sector and developing according to their potentialities. Nevertheless, it can be argued that -more than in previous stages- the cooperatives "have propitiated the elevation of the rural population's standard of living" and "economically (...) they have demonstrated their potentialities" (Fernández, 2005). In keeping with this, Jiménez (2012) affirms that "in Cuba agricultural cooperatives contribute to the strengthening of local development, as they are linked to the territory where they are located".

The new Constitution of 2019, and since before the experiments promoted by the process of updating the Cuban socio-economic model (Decree-Law 305 of 2012 "ON NON-FARM COOPERATIVES" and Decree 309 of the same year, "REGULATIONS ON NON-FARM COOPERATIVES OF THE FIRST GRADE"), have planted the challenge of expanding the cooperative sector beyond agriculture. To this end, one of the many tasks is the consolidation of a socio-economic movement with its own identity that, as such, articulates and institutionalizes the intercooperation between cooperatives

and between cooperatives and local authorities and their communities.

In this sense, it is pertinent to take into account the criteria of Marín de León and Rivera Rodríguez (2015) who, in a first approximation to a Public Management Model for the Cooperative Sector in Cuba, propose to contemplate a training strategy, programs, projects and territorial policies; as well as to insert themselves in the process of local strategic design, taking into account the economic, socio-cultural, environmental and institutional dimension. This proposal to link the management of the cooperative sector to the community is linked to the broad perspectives opened up by the process of updating the national socio-economic model for cooperative relations - municipal decentralization in various aspects of local life (PCC, 2017b; Rodríguez & Hernández, 2015), insofar as the Local Bodies of People's Power can identify the priority areas for the intervention of cooperatives, with the participation of the cooperatives themselves, since nobody knows better the needs of the territory, which in the end are those of the cooperatives themselves.

The latter can be favoured by involving cooperatives -together with other local actors- in the planning of the economy from the territory, with a view, on the one hand, to the National Plan and, on the other, to the needs of the specific community in question, insofar as their existence "is conditioned by the objectives of socialist development" (PCC, 2017a), in a model in which the State is responsible for "...planning, regulating, leading and controlling the process of economic and social development, guiding all the actors" (PCC, 2017a). For this, it would be convenient to regulate compensatory mechanisms for the payment of their taxes, so that the quantum of these is inversely proportional to the socioeconomic actions undertaken by

them to contribute to the public burdens. In this way, an environment could be generated that combines planning with cooperative initiative on the one hand, and control of local power bodies with direct social responsibility of cooperatives on the other.

In line with this context of ideas and proposals, in the issue of *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo* (COODES) that is now being presented, readers will be able to find various topics associated with processes relating to the management of cooperatives and local development. From different approaches to science, as well as from different latitudes, the authors systematize theoretical-methodological references, new knowledge and practical experiences that point towards socio-economic development with an integral, inclusive and sustainable approach, as required to successfully carry out the process of updating the Cuban socialist model.

In this regard, it is worth highlighting analyses on the legal protection of the rights of vulnerable social sectors such as pregnant women and the elderly in non-agricultural cooperatives in Pinar del Río. Likewise, it is argued a design for the agricultural programs prioritized in the Pinar del Río municipality of "La Palma", a proposal that could be enriched with other studies of the province present in this issue of the journal, such as that of the "La Época" Canning Factory, from Consolación del Sur municipality, an entity that works to execute a local development project aimed at the production and commercialization of preserved fruits and vegetables - even canned ones.

With respect to the management from the Public Administration, another article offers important evaluations with respect to its effectiveness, where the pertinence of a cultural transformation in the subjects in charge is defended, in order that they can fulfill the assigned management functions simplifying procedures and making a rational use of new technologies. In the same direction, another work contributes a procedure to facilitate the evaluation of the impact of the training that from the beginning of the process of updating the Cuban socioeconomic model receives the tables and reserves of the whole country, by means of the multiple editions of the Diploma of Management and Business Management.

Angola proposes a procedure for the management of training in terms of agricultural cooperative development, since production in this sector is of vital importance for overcoming food shortages and guaranteeing food security for the population, and the commitment to the cooperative model to achieve this is very interesting for this African context.

Finally, the agroecological reconversion of a farm in Las Tunas and in Sancti Spíritus, the AGROCADENAS project, shows two experiences of good practices through which value is added to agricultural productions, both from an economic and social point of view.

Once the articles have been presented and the pertinence of their ideas has been verified, the only thing left to do is to recommend their reading, with the certainty that, at the very least, they will contribute to fostering timely debates to democratize the productive processes in pursuit of social justice.

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