

## Cooperativism in Spain and Cuba: converging ideas on women's participation

### El cooperativismo en España y Cuba: ideas convergentes sobre la participación de las mujeres

### Cooperativismo em Espanha e Cuba: ideias convergentes sobre a participação das mulheres

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#### ABSTRACT

Due to their characteristics, cooperatives have a great potential for women and men to participate on equal terms, although gender imbalances still exist. In order to explore this issue, this paper reviews the evolution of the cooperative movement with respect to gender equality, paying attention to the forces in the environment that have strengthened this position. It also analyses the elements that act in environments as disparate as those of Cuba and Spain and that favor the participation of women in cooperatives. Reference is made to Non-agricultural Cooperatives in Cuba and Associated Work Cooperatives in Spain, which are similar organizations. Using a qualitative methodology, theoretical methods of a socio-legal nature were used, which made it possible to focus on the evolution of cooperativism as part of a historical process and to compare the cases of both countries. The corpus has been made up of the main international declarations on gender and the Social Economy, as well as laws, regional and national public policies that promote gender equality in cooperatives. The results indicate that, with the particularities of each country, the evolution of the international context has exerted pressure for action in this area. However, the changes introduced by cooperatives require that the experience for women be successful, in terms of promoting real long-term empowerment and being a viable economic alternative that transcends the times of crisis that have encouraged them.



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**Keywords:** cooperatives; Cuba; social economy; empowerment; Spain; gender; public policies

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## RESUMEN

Por sus características, las cooperativas tienen un gran potencial para que mujeres y hombres participen en igualdad de condiciones, aunque todavía existen desequilibrios de género. Con el objetivo de indagar en esta cuestión, en el presente trabajo se revisa la evolución del movimiento cooperativista respecto a la igualdad de género, prestando atención a las fuerzas del entorno que han reforzado esa posición. También se analizan los elementos que actúan en entornos tan dispares como el de Cuba y España y que favorecen la participación de las mujeres en las cooperativas. Se toman como referencia las Cooperativas No Agropecuarias en Cuba y las Cooperativas de Trabajo Asociado en España, por constituir organizaciones análogas. Desde una metodología cualitativa, se emplearon métodos teóricos de carácter sociojurídico, que permitieron enfocar la evolución del cooperativismo como parte de un proceso histórico y comparar los casos de ambos países. El corpus ha estado constituido por las principales declaraciones internacionales en materia de género y Economía Social, así como leyes, políticas públicas regionales y nacionales que fomentan la igualdad de género en las cooperativas. Los resultados indican que, con las particularidades de cada país, la evolución del contexto internacional ha ejercido presión para la adopción de medidas en la materia. No obstante, los cambios que introduzcan las cooperativas requieren que la experiencia para las mujeres sea exitosa, en términos de que favorezca el empoderamiento real a largo plazo y sea una alternativa económica viable que trascienda a los tiempos de crisis que las han fomentado.

**Palabras clave:** cooperativas; Cuba; Economía Social; empoderamiento; España; género; políticas públicas

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## RESUMO

Devido às suas características, as cooperativas têm um grande potencial para mulheres e homens participarem em condições de igualdade, embora ainda existam desequilíbrios de género. A fim de pesquisar nesta questão, este trabalho revê a evolução do movimento cooperativo no que diz respeito à igualdade de género, prestando atenção às forças no ambiente que reforçaram esta posição. Analisa também os elementos que agem em ambientes tão dispares como os de Cuba e Espanha e que favorecem a participação das mulheres nas cooperativas. É feita referência a Cooperativas Não Agropecuárias em Cuba e a Cooperativas de Trabalho Associado na Espanha, que são organizações análogas. Utilizando uma metodologia qualitativa, foram utilizados métodos teóricos de natureza sócio-jurídica, que permitiram focar a evolução do cooperativismo como parte de um processo histórico e comparar os casos de ambos os países. O corpus foi constituído pelas principais declarações internacionais sobre género e Economia Social, bem como leis, políticas públicas regionais e nacionais que promovem a igualdade de género nas cooperativas. Os resultados indicam que, com as particularidades de cada país, a evolução do contexto internacional tem exercido pressão para a ação nesta área. Contudo, as mudanças introduzidas pelas cooperativas exigem

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que a experiência das mulheres seja bem sucedida, em termos de promover o verdadeiro empoderamento a longo prazo e ser uma alternativa económica viável que transcenda os tempos de crise que as têm fomentado.

**Palavras-chave:** cooperativas; Cuba; economia social: empoderamento; Espanha; género; políticas públicas

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## INTRODUCTION

Due to their characteristics, cooperatives have great potential for women and men to participate on equal terms, however, there are still gender imbalances because these organizations are also a reflection of the societies in which they operate (Elio Cemborain, 2006). For this reason, it is proposed to identify those elements of the environment that influence cooperatives to increasingly adopt measures aimed at equal participation of men and women. To this end, and due to the similarity of their characteristics, the current context of promotion of Non-Agricultural Cooperatives (CNOA in Spanish) in Cuba and Associated Work Cooperatives (CTA in Spanish) in Spain is examined, with the intention of noting the elements that operate in the achievement of change and its scope.

Lagarde (1996) considers that "gender" is not equivalent to "woman" because using these categories as equivalents neutralizes the explanatory possibilities of the gender perspective; that is, it does not evidence the relational nature of gender or the historical and social processes in which an order based on sexuality and, as such, an order of power, originates and is reproduced. The relevance of this clarification in the study is due to the fact that the multiple institutional references alluded to do not necessarily introduce a gender focus aimed at modifying the sources of men's dominance over women, but rather at improving women's participation in the labor market. This purpose deserves special attention because of its impact on women's lives, but at the same time it also shows the real scope of cooperatives to achieve gender equity.

Certainly, women's participation in the labor market is a means of achieving their social and economic empowerment, insofar as it allows them to have more options and resources, as well as to gain greater autonomy. Consequently, the pursuit of gender equity entails taking measures that compensate for the historical and social disadvantages suffered. In turn, cooperatives represent themselves as organizations capable of responding to practical and strategic gender needs. However, the disadvantages remain and continue to be reproduced because, ultimately, the gender imbalance is deeply rooted in the division of labor, both within and outside the family. In this sense, any proposal that seeks to address gender inequality must necessarily transcend the organizational dimension.

On the sexual division of labor, Aguado and Ballesteros (2018) emphasize that the incorporation of women into the labor market is not equal in all sectors and at all levels of employment and is often accompanied by processes of occupational segregation. Theories of employment segmentation show how they concentrate their activity in sectors that are feminized by social standards -what is called horizontal segregation- and in segments that have little authority, are poorly paid and have a low probability of promotion, also called vertical segregation. This propensity, which favors men, is

produced by multiple causes that have to do with the country's productive structure, organizational models or the existence of roles and stereotypes.

In this area of analysis, Spain and Cuba are not unaware of the imbalance in the labor market. According to the United Nations' Gender Inequality Index for 2018, in terms of labor force participation, the participation rate for women in Spain is 53.4 and for men 62.7, while in Cuba it is 40.0 and 67.4 respectively (UNDP, 2019). In the case of the CTAs, in December 2017, there were 6,746 workers (excluding the self-employed regime, i.e. persons subject to a special regime when working on their own account), concentrating 76% of the activity in the service sector, especially in education, health and social activities. Certainly, it is not easy to extract data on the situation of women in the CTAs because the official figures include all types of cooperatives. However, the report "Women in Work Cooperatives" by COCETA 2019 concludes that the participation of women in management and responsibility positions represents an average of 54%, when in 2014 it was 39%, thus perceiving an improvement.

In Cuba, according to data provided by Mesa et al. (2018), in the first quarter of 2017 there were 411 registered CNOA, representing 7.5% of all cooperatives. In the opinion of Rodríguez and Valle (2019), in these associative forms the management positions are mostly occupied by men, who "carry out functions such as those of President, Substitute for the President or Administrator; and positions such as that of Secretary are left for the members. Such assignments reproduce gender stereotypes, permeated by vertical and horizontal segregation" (p. 76). They also rightly warn that, in general, in the case of Cuba, there is an insufficient gender perspective in the cooperative rules, in addition to a low level of education among the members, low representation in positions of greater responsibility, overloaded work, as a result of the double role of social worker and housewife, and a "lack of training in issues related to gender equity and poor coordination between the CNOA and the community" (p. 90); all of which reveals current challenges in the approach to the gender-cooperative binomial.

On the other hand, a sociological approach to the analysis of the labor market requires that it be considered a social institution and, as such, is subject to embedding. This implies that institutions, while orienting human exchanges through the conventions and forms of behavior that they define, are affected by such exchanges. Thus, organizations incorporate from the environment cultural elements, beliefs and rules that are taken for granted as patterns for organizing themselves and, in doing so, also affect the dynamics of change.

The institutional environment is composed of a diversity of values and norms from different stakeholders, which express their expectations about how an organization should behave. This situation places the organization in front of what organizational institutionalism defines as legitimization; that is, that the organization's behavior be perceived as congruent with what is expected of it and thus guarantee its survival. In a complex environment, in order to be perceived as legitimate, organizations in the same field tend to resemble each other (isomorphism), by assuming common structures and approaches (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). In this order of ideas, public policies to promote equality between women and men are part of the coercive forces coming from the environment that lead companies to introduce changes in the matter to gain legitimacy.

In order to investigate this issue, this paper reviews the evolution of the cooperative movement with respect to gender equality, paying attention to the forces in the environment that have strengthened this position. It also analyses the elements that act in environments as disparate as those of Cuba and Spain and that favor the participation of women in cooperatives. To this end, reference is made to the Non-Agricultural Cooperatives (CNOA) in Cuba and the Associated Work Cooperatives (CTA) in Spain, since they are similar organizations, to the extent that both have the main objective of providing employment to their members.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

A qualitative methodology has been used, taking into account that the study focuses on women's participation in the CTAs in Spain and the CNOAs in Cuba, from the social and legal perspective of gender equality. These forms of cooperative organization have been selected considering their potential for the participation of women as members and workers. Likewise, the novelty of the CNOA in Cuba and the parallelism that can be established with the CTA in Spain, since both figures provide employment to their members, justify a joint look at both organizational models and the process they have followed in each country. It has a descriptive and correlational approach, offering a qualitative assessment of the incidence of female participation in the cooperative sector, its normative expression and the regularities of its behavior in social practice, both in the Cuban and Spanish cases. To this end, theoretical methods of a socio-legal nature were used, such as the historical-logical, the analysis-synthesis, the systemic-structural-functional and the legal comparison.

The historical-legal method made it possible to systematize the reality of the evolution of cooperativism and gender policies as part of a historical process developed in concrete situations, which has led to a critical review of the documents in which such progress is embodied and to their analysis as part of a whole that reproduces the dominant social order. The analysis-synthesis has been an exercise in identifying and examining those elements of a normative and social nature surrounding the CTAs and the CNOAs, which has allowed the establishment of relations between the cooperative identity and the measures adopted on gender equality in different instances. This method has also been complemented with the legal-comparative one, in order to point out common or divergent elements between Cuba and Spain in the cooperative field. In turn, the systemic-structural-functional method has been used, which, from a sociological and legal perspective, favored the assessment of the effectiveness of the regulations in force for this purpose, in accordance with the cooperative social contexts and, in correlation, allowed the impact of the gender policy to be elucidated if it were designed with a transversal approach in the rest of the public policies.

Similarly, the content analysis method was applied for the objective, coherent and systematic study of materials and bibliographic information. In this case, it has made it possible to classify and unravel the essence of the subject in textbooks, legal norms and scientific articles related to the cooperative-gender binomial, from the fields of social responsibility and public policies on gender equality. All the referred documents

constituted the basis for the study in question and the consequent critical analysis of current convergences and future perspectives.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Cooperative identity and international trends in gender equality**

Modern cooperativism, based on the solidarity and democratic participation of its members, has had an inclusive and anti-discriminatory vocation since its origins. Pioneering projects -such as the Rodchale cooperative of 1840- admitted as equal members women and, in general, people belonging to any social class, regardless of their ideology or religion. These principles have inspired the International Cooperative Association's (ICA) Declaration of Cooperative Identity adopted since 1995, which recognizes the cooperative as an autonomous association of people, voluntarily united to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. This content takes the form of a legally binding definition, as set out in points 2 and 3, as well as in the annex to the Recommendation on the Promotion of Cooperatives, patented by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2002. Likewise, the United Nations Organization, since 2001, has recommended governments to include it in their laws on cooperatives.

More specifically, in the analysis of the principles that support the Alliance, a clear positioning of working in the search for equity and overcoming gender discrimination is evident. The approval of the 1995 Declaration of the Cooperative Identity and its resolution on "gender equity in cooperatives" must be understood in a world context of greater demand for the recognition of women's rights, such as the 4th World Conference on the Situation of Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. In this sense, in its Strategy to promote gender equity, the ICA has recognized that treating people in different situations equally perpetuates inequalities and highlights the link between cooperativism and gender empowerment to transform power relations and achieve gender equity. Thus, the advantages of cooperativism to positively impact on gender equity are increasingly recognized, including by the ILO when it highlights the potential of cooperatives in this area.

Cooperative association also has advantages for women and men to participate on equal terms, to get out of the informal economy in less developed countries or to increase their self-confidence. However, it is questioned whether women are taking advantage of the potential of cooperative organization and whether traditional cooperatives are taking advantage of the potential they represent. Elio (2006) notes that most cooperatives are run by men, which implies that they are based on male values, norms and priorities, thus revealing the contradictions between cooperative theory and social practice.

However, the incorporation of "gender equality" in the regulations affecting cooperatives must be understood within broader public policy frameworks that prioritize equal opportunities between men and women. At European level, the commitment to this objective in the labor market is included in the 1957 Treaty establishing the European Community and the successive steps have evolved in line with the Women's Conferences

held at world level. With the adoption, since the Beijing Conference, of the principle of *gendermainstreaming*, the European Union has integrated the promotion of gender equality into all its policies and actions. Already in 1996, the Council of the European Union recommended that measures be taken to ensure a balanced participation of men and women in decision-making positions. Subsequently, in 2010, the Commission adopted "A Women's Charter" which emphasizes the need to ensure equal opportunities for access to the labor market. The successive strategic frameworks and commitments adopted reflect the Commission's position on gender equality in the labor market and its intention to translate it into cross-cutting public policies.

Of the three declarations that the Council is developing in 2019, with regard to gender equality, the one on "Economies that promote gender equality: future perspectives" (14938/19) stands out, where the governments of the Union are urged to consider gender policies as a priority and to adopt a dual strategy for the promotion of women, in which the gender perspective is systematically integrated into all policies and actions. An intersectional perspective is also required, recognizing that not all situations of inequality affect all women equally, according to social class, ethnic origin or other axes of structural discrimination, and this is reflected in its strategy for gender equality for the period 2020-2025. As a result of this strategy and the public policies developed by the Member States, cooperatives, like other economic organizations, will be forced to take measures relating, for example, to the under-representation of women in management positions.

In Latin America, the cooperative movement is aware of the contradiction between cooperative principles and practical results. At the XI Meeting on Gender Equity of the XIX Regional Conference of Cooperatives of the Americas in 2015, it was concluded that there are still cultural and organizational barriers to taking advantage of the talent of all its members. Action was considered in different management areas to reduce gender gaps, such as membership participation, staff selection and recruitment, professional development, salary policy, access to decision-making positions, reconciliation between work and family, governance practices, membership services, among others.

In this sense, among the recommendations made by the ICA-Americas, through its Regional Committee on Gender Equality (CREG), there are proposals referred to the inclusion of cooperative members in decision-making positions, the mainstreaming of actions and the exchange of good practices regarding equality, training on the subject and sensitization of the corresponding bodies, the training of gender promoters and the generation of leadership, as well as the strengthening of the accountability of the cooperatives themselves regarding the advancement of gender equality and equity.

### **The case of Spain: a long journey linked to the development of public policies**

The long history of cooperatives in Spain places the first regulated CTAs in the 1930s. When analyzing the period 1940-2000, Román (2014) observes that the evolution of CTAs responds to market stimuli. However, "it was during the stages of low GDP growth that the cooperative societies, as a whole, achieved greater dynamism, thus reinforcing their counter-cyclical profile" (Román Cervantes, 2014, p. 106). Thus, although the CTAs began to grow from the end of the 1950s, in line with the birth of the Mondragón Cooperative Group in the Basque Country, their expansion in the 1970s was related to

industrial development and their capacity to respond to unemployment (Román Cervantes, 2014). This trend continued until the mid-eighties, but with the incorporation of Spain into the European Union, which encourages the creation of trading companies and other forms of associated work such as labor companies, in a context, moreover, of economic growth, the development of CTAs slows down. However, with the economic crisis of 2008, this form of association is once again being promoted, as it is considered an effective organization for responding to the challenges of globalization.

On the other hand, specific mention of gender equality or measures to achieve it in legislation on cooperatives is relatively recent and linked to the wider deployment of gender policies. This is understandable not so much because legislators considered it unnecessary to make such a mention when assuming that the cooperative principles already include gender equality, but because the evolution of the applicable regulations has been linked to the different political stages the country has gone through. It is therefore relevant that the most recent regulations make reference to gender equality, in a context where this issue is considered a political priority.

In a brief overview, it can be seen that the first Law on Cooperatives of September 1931, promulgated during the Second Republic, was repealed by the Law on Cooperatives of 1942, published by the Franco dictatorship (Román Cervantes, 2014). This repeal meant moving from a cooperative model, inspired by the principles of the ICA, to one that involved subjecting cooperativism and other economic institutions to political control. The 1942 Law remained in force until the 1974 Cooperatives Law which, as Román notes, Spain had not yet begun the transition to democracy, although it did introduce greater flexibility, for example, by not linking the concept of the cooperative to "non-profit", giving them a business character.

Since the 1990s, Spain has been committed to a more determined policy of support for the Social Economy, which, among other things, took shape with the approval of a new Cooperatives Act in 1999, updating the former General Cooperatives Act of 1987, which had brought the 1974 Act up to date in the new democratic and socio-economic context. In the new regulation, European guidelines are incorporated and it is made functional in a context of exclusive, decentralized competences over the Autonomous Communities. Likewise, the Law defines the cooperative societies in line with the ICA's Declaration of Identity and refers expressly to the cooperative principles, formulated by the ICA. The concept of the CTAs is very similar to Cuba's CNOA (Monreal Garrido, 2018), which are specified as those that aim to provide their members with jobs through their personal and direct, part-time or full-time efforts, through the common organization of the production of goods or services for third parties. Furthermore, with Law 5 (2011), Spanish cooperatives are included in the group of organizations that make up the Social Economy. It should be noted that the modern concept of the Social Economy is inspired by the principles of cooperativism and also includes the mutual societies, associations and foundations that carry out economic activity (Monzón & Chaves, 2017).

As mentioned above, the introduction of references and measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women in the regulations on cooperatives and the Social Economy cannot be understood without the development and support of broader and more transversal gender policies. In Spain, since the creation of the Women's Institute in 1983 and with the adoption of successive equal opportunity plans, the conditions for



the development of public policies on gender equality have been generated. However, it was in the 1990s that the institutionalization of gender equality policies was consolidated, more clearly incorporating the area of the labor market. These advances will have a special development during the mandate of the Socialist Government from 2004, highlighting the approval of the Organic Law 3/2007 for the effective equality of women and men (Lombardo & León, 2014).

The aforementioned Organic Law placed the principle of equality at the center of all public policies of public administrations, established measures for the prevention of discriminatory behavior and provided for active policies leading to the protection and real effectiveness of the principle of equality. It also regulated aspects to guarantee this principle in the labor market, establishing the obligation to negotiate with legal representatives of the workers the elaboration of equality plans and the adoption of measures to promote equality. The amendment of this Act by Royal Decree-Law 6 (2019), of 1 March, established the obligation to draw up equality plans in companies with 50 or more employees, referring to all types of organizations, including those in the social economy.

The renewed drive for equality policies, both in Europe and in Spain, from 2010 onwards was subordinated to the austerity policies of the 2008 economic crisis, which meant a step backwards in this area and in the application of the principle of mainstreaming (Lombardo & León, 2014). The demand for equal opportunities for men and women in the labor market is again gaining strength after the crisis, but with a discourse more linked to the economic benefits of complying with this principle. It is not by chance that in 2017 the European Institute for Gender Equality spoke about the economic benefits of gender equality in terms of increasing GDP, productivity, boosting competitiveness, reducing unemployment or better coping with the ageing of the European Union's population.

For its part, the promotion of a public policy on the Social Economy at European level coincides with the start of the economic crisis. This is highlighted by Monzón & Chaves (2017, p. 41) when they point out that "after the outbreak of the economic crisis, the European Parliament published a resolution on the Social Economy (19 February 2009, OJ of 25.3.2010) and the European Economic and Social Committee published an opinion on "Different types of enterprises"". These authors highlight the relevance of these texts and how, from 2009, several actions were undertaken in favor of social enterprises, adopting the public policy approach. It should be noted that, at the request of the European Parliament's resolution of 5 July 2018 with recommendations to the Commission on a statute for social and solidarity-based enterprises, the idea of the contribution of these enterprises to achieving gender equality and reducing the pay gap is reinforced. In turn, with the approval of the Spanish Social Economy Strategy 2017-2020 (2018), Axis 9 was introduced: Promoting gender equality and social inclusion in the social economy.

Landing on the regulations that directly affect cooperative organizations, it should be noted that Law 27/1999 on Cooperatives makes no specific reference to gender equality, while Law 5 (2011) on the Social Economy does incorporate it when it states the "promotion of internal solidarity and solidarity with society that favors commitment to local development, equal opportunities between men and women, social cohesion (...)"

(art. 4c). If the sixteen legislations on cooperatives of the Autonomous Communities are reviewed, it is identified that some improve the State framework: five do not introduce it, one of them refers to the general regulations and the rest mentions some reference.

In this sense, Andalusia and Cantabria stand out for adding gender equality to the principles set out by the ICA. The legislations of Aragon, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Andalusia include activities to achieve effective equality between men and women in the Education and Cooperative Promotion Fund. In varying degrees of detail, the legislations of Andalusia, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Valencia, Extremadura and Galicia emphasize the need for women to be represented in the bodies of cooperatives. Both the Galician and the Aragonese laws specifically include aspects related to the social integration of women victims of violence. Finally, others such as Asturias, Cantabria, Valencia and Murcia, referring to the promotion of cooperativism, visualize the need to articulate these measures with other programs that these communities develop to remove gender inequalities. With regard to the CTAs, the regulation of issues related to gender equality in the particular corporate relationship of work provision, maternity and the reconciliation of professional and working life is very little developed in the cooperative legislation, which generally refers to the internal regulations of the company (Villafáñez Pérez, 2017).

### **The case of Cuba: process of updating the socialist economic model with challenges around the mainstreaming of gender policy**

The cooperative as a peculiar corporate system has been one of the forms of economic management, implemented in Cuba, thus providing a socialist alternative of collective ownership. Cooperatives are important actors in the Social and Solidarity Economy, insofar as cooperativism itself represents an expression of social justice as a response to a capitalist economic system, based on the accumulation of wealth. In this sense, the updating of the Cuban economic model has strengthened cooperative ownership and, in particular, that focused on the non-agricultural sector, with notable increases in the last decade.

The antecedents of the cooperative movement in Cuba dates back to the pre-revolutionary period and has gone through different stages: from the existence of transport cooperatives before 1959 to the recent expansion of non-agricultural cooperatives on the island. With the enactment of the Agrarian Reform Law, cooperatives were first promoted for the agricultural sector, essentially the Credit and Service Cooperatives (CCS in Spanish) in 1960, the Agricultural Production Cooperatives (CPA in Spanish) in 1975, and the Basic Units of Cooperative Production (UBPC in Spanish) in 1993; all of them on state initiative and respecting the principle of voluntariness, unlike in other countries of the former socialist bloc. However, Cuban cooperativism of the 21st century acquires other dimensions after the updating of the economic model that took place with the VI Congress of the Party in 2011, specifically because of what is endorsed in numerals 25 to 29 of the Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution. In this way, from 2012 onwards, the creation of cooperatives in sectors other than agriculture will be regulated on an experimental basis.

Subsequently, after the VII Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, the Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution for the period 2016-2021

include cooperative ownership as one of the forms inserted in the model of economic management, emphasizing that it is necessary to advance in the experiment of non-agricultural cooperatives, prioritizing those activities aimed at offering solutions to local development. Similarly, the Cuban Constitution, proclaimed in 2019, supports the cooperative as a form of ownership, inserted in a new model of economic management. Therefore, the implementation of cooperatives, particularly non-agricultural ones, has been not only an expression of the Cuban State's political will, but also an important source of income for the citizens. For Bengoetxea (2018, p. 218): "The Cuban public authorities propose employment in cooperatives as an effective alternative to the very notable surplus of personnel observed in the state sector, which is around one million people".

The considerable rise of non-agricultural cooperativism in recent years has brought with it a consequent profusion of theory, research and legislation on the subject (Bengoetxea Alkorta, 2018; Monreal Garrido, 2018; Rodríguez Musa & Valle Ríos, 2019). The year 2019 marked a milestone with the updating of the cooperative legal framework in the country, with the repeal of the previous Decree-Law 305 and Decree 309, in force since 2012, and the entry into force of Decree-Law No. 366 and its Regulations (Decree No. 356), as well as Resolutions 361 and 362 on tax matters, all of which refer to the CNOA. Thus, the current Decree-Law No. 366/19, approved by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba (2019), establishes that the CNOA constitute organizations with economic and social purposes (Article 2.1), whose objective is the production of goods and the provision of services (Article 2.2) and that they are labor cooperatives, where each of the members has as their main contribution their personal work (Article 5).

Although non-agricultural cooperativism has been extensively addressed in the legal, economic and social spheres, the specific approach to the category "gender" is a neglected element in the Cuban case. Although some embryonic studies are noted, certainly "there are no known relevant efforts to strengthen gender equity within these new forms of association" (Rodríguez Musa & Valle Ríos, 2019, p. 71). On the other hand, from a reading of the current legal norms, it is possible to adduce the explicit omission of the gender category in the cooperative scenario. This implies that, although the issue of the CNOA in Cuba is relatively recent, the inclusion of the gender perspective is certainly incipient.

When examining public policies relating to the gender perspective within the cooperative phenomenon in Cuba, the Guidelines of the Communist Party of Cuba of 2017 and the Constitution of the Republic, reformed in 2019, stand out. The latter enshrines non-discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, as well as the equality of men and women before the law, with recognized rights and obligations for both. However, it is valid to note that there is no specific law such as the Spanish Organic Law of 2007 for the effective equality of women and men, nor is there a transversal approach in the rest of the policies.

It is also worth noting that, briefly, the gender perspective has found a foothold in the documents approved at the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in 2017. Among the socialist principles that underpin the model, there is moral and legal recognition of the equal rights and duties of citizens and the guarantees to make them effective with equity, inclusion, social justice, political participation, overcoming social

gaps, respect for diversity and confronting all forms of discrimination based on skin color, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, territorial and national origin, religious belief, age and any other distinction that is harmful to human dignity.

It is worth mentioning that the Documents of the Seventh Congress of the Cuban Communist Party also recognize gender as a process of social and historical construction, through which relations between people are shaped, as legitimized as male and female in a given culture, space and time. However, despite the definitions of gender and the political vocation to insert the issue of gender, expressed for the first time in the Cuban political framework, it has still been insufficient, not integrated or mainstreamed, which in turn makes its configuration within the cooperative phenomenon more complex.

As Rodríguez rightly warns (2018, p. 43), while it is true that cooperatives should "manifest themselves as a counter-capitalist associative space (counter-speculation, counter-intermediaries, counter-sponsorship, counter-profit)", to this should be added "counter-gender discrimination" as an expression of a comprehensive approach that should be mainstreamed from public policies. Its implementation should aim at rethinking the phenomenon of cooperativism from the legislative, social and cultural points of view, above all because of the potential that cooperatives offer as ideal organizations for achieving gender equity.

In addition to this idea, Rodríguez and Valle (2019) offer specific alternatives for the Cuban case, such as the promotion of intercooperation and the formalization of collaboration agreements between cooperatives, or between cooperatives and other civil society entities such as the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC in Spanish). In turn, these authors emphasize the role of Cuban legal counsel in the design of internal policies and in the drafting, interpretation and application of legal provisions (statutes, internal regulations, assembly agreements, etc.). Furthermore, they indicate that it would be very useful to use the model of direct cooperative social responsibility, in accordance with existing models in Cuba, as well as to attempt to create equality plans in the CNOA, as the Spanish custom.

More than a mere comparison between the CNOA in Cuba and the CTA in Spain, the study has outlined pillars of cooperativism in both countries. Although differences in their legal and political configuration can be seen, in both countries they are considered as an alternative to the crisis and their potential to contribute to the construction of more equitable relations between women and men is recognized. In addition to the cultural substrate that limits the achievement of these objectives, the results have made it possible to identify environmental forces that can lead to organizational change in the area of gender equality. In this regard, the following issues are problematized:

#### **a. Cuba's CNOA and Spain's CTA as alternative models of business organization**

The CNOA in Cuba and the CTA in Spain correspond, according to Monreal's criterion (2018, p. 234), "to a modality of the cooperative business model, its distinctive element and its main objective being to provide work to its members and not only goods and/or services under more favorable conditions, like the other cooperative modalities". With these characteristics and despite certain differences between Cuba and Spain, the

cooperatives of both countries are attributed similar virtues for the creation of self-employment, especially in crisis situations.

In Cuba, the CNOA are presented as a socialist alternative in a context of economic crisis and, in turn, as a means of development, while the State has needed feasible management models in the Social and Solidarity Economy scenario. For its part, despite the long history of cooperatives in Spain, their evolution shows that the periods of greatest expansion of this type of organization correspond to those of economic recession. During periods of economic growth, both Europe and Spain have encouraged other forms of economic organization that are more appropriate to the capitalist context, such as public limited companies, limited liability companies and even labor companies. However, since the economic crisis of 2008 there has been a determined recovery, perhaps aimed precisely at showing this form of business organization as a capacity to adapt to times of crisis.

Despite this, the forms of social and solidarity-based organization are far from structuring the dominant economic model, so they coexist and compete with its rules. The social division of labor can lead to social economy organizations taking on the majority of the more social (and, by the way, less "profitable") activities, such as ensuring job opportunities for vulnerable groups, where women are usually located. In this last aspect, it is important to be alert to horizontal segregation processes in which women's cooperatives may become forms of subsistence rather than promotion and development.

#### **b. The pressure of the organizational environment on the adoption of measures for equality between men and women in the workplace**

Another virtue attributed to cooperatives is their ability to promote equality between men and women, precisely because they consider it to be inherent in their values, principles and organizational form. However, available studies and sex-differentiated data (where provided), show that cooperatives still have a lack of basis on the road to equal participation between men and women. This is because, like any type of social organization, cooperatives reflect the values, prejudices and stereotypes of the societies in which they operate. Thus, the imbalances in the participation of women and men in cooperatives in Cuba and Spain do not escape the logic of androcentric economic models, which provide men with better opportunities and working conditions.

As indicated above, organizations incorporate cultural elements taken from the environment and the pressures coming from it affect the modification of their behavior. In a context of growing global pressure to promote women's rights, the ICA's Declaration of Identity and the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, both in 1995, constituted a turning point that facilitated the application of the principle of mainstreaming in all public policies. Its translation into concrete plans and legislation has become a coercive force coming from the environment in which the organizations operate.

Thus, the tendency to incorporate measures to equalize the participation of women and men in the enterprise does not only concern cooperatives (which are assumed to have taken it on), but also conventional enterprises. By obligation or by conviction, both types

of enterprises compete in a market where they need to introduce equality measures to gain legitimacy, as has happened in Spain. In addition, different studies increasingly emphasize the economic benefits for companies of taking advantage of women's talent. In practice, this approach is moving further and further away from the understanding of equality between women and men as a question of fundamental rights, to become part of the logic of the market.

If the theory of competitive advantage prevails in promoting the equal participation of women and men in enterprises, the cultural substrate underlying the gender imbalance will remain intact. It is precisely a critical view of gender reformism that characterizes certain institutionalized approaches to gender equality, which, despite the rhetoric used, do not address the fundamental issues of gendered power relations.

In the case of Cuba, although the NACs are making their own journey, the available data show a trend towards greater participation by men than women. Despite the fact that the Cuban socio-economic context differs substantially from that of Spain and that the logic of trade does not predominate, the lags in a patriarchal society where the economic management has been entrusted mainly to men, relegating women to household roles and others that are less prominent in the labor sphere, prevail.

### **c. Convergence between the policy of promoting cooperatives and gender policy**

The evolution of equality between women and men in Spain cannot be understood without analyzing the convergence between the gender policies promoted by the government and the promotion of the Social Economy. Thus, Law 27/1999 on cooperatives did not specifically allude to gender equality, but the 2011 Social Economy Law, passed after the 2007 Law on Equality between Men and Women, does. Only after a public policy on gender, converging with a public policy on the Social Economy and reinforced by the mandate of the European Union, can the notable progress in gender indicators be seen (COCETA, 2019).

In the Cuban case, despite the firm commitment to cooperativism in non-agricultural sectors and to a gender policy at the highest legislative and political level, this convergence is not yet in sight. The Spanish experience indicates that it is not enough to trust in the virtues of the cooperative model for these organizations to advocate for gender equality, but that they demand an additional initiative. In this regard, the available data point to the need to substantially improve the indicators of vertical and horizontal segregation. The Island's current support for a comprehensive gender policy is an ideal moment for such convergence between public policies. Furthermore, a more attentive study of gender equity within non-agricultural cooperatives would make it possible to identify equitable approaches, raising the issue of the need for inter-cooperation, direct cooperative social responsibility, training and the configuration of equality plans in this sector.

However, a convergent public policy on promoting gender equality and the Social Economy is positive, but it is not enough either. In Spain, we have seen how economic crises tend to sacrifice the first of the objectives and the second stands as every redeemer that does not always satisfy social demands. Hence the need for an economy

focused on people and on gender equality as a fundamental right, conceived in a cross-cutting manner and equipped with sufficient resources and structures to achieve this. The risk in Cuba is similar, considering that gender policy is not conceived in a transversal way towards the rest of public policies. Although non-agricultural cooperativism is an important source of employment for women, they end up being hired in highly feminized and more precarious sectors (textile work, manufacturing, care regime, among others). In this sense, the intended empowerment, in turn, has only perpetuated the traditional gender roles in Cuban social practice, responding to a great extent to the rest of the current models of economic management.

#### **d. Cooperatives and their potential contribution to gender equality**

Despite the criticisms described above, there are many expectations placed on cooperatives to cope with crisis situations and to achieve economic inclusion and empowerment of women, whether in Spain or in Cuba. Studies on the subject point out how the legal format of cooperatives allows them to challenge traditional roles, act independently, make their own choices and empower themselves, while at the same time enabling them to create a space for innovative projects, even when their activity is limited to those that are traditionally feminized (Gómez Carrasco, 2019). The referred author also affirms that the agency is transformative as long as the challenge of roles is limited to immediate issues and is used to initiate a process of long-term change in the structures of the patriarchy, which will be achieved if the cooperative obtains positive results and constitutes an entry point to carry out transformative changes, which must be assumed collectively.

Therefore, creating women's cooperatives or promoting equality in this form of organization is still insufficient, so all kinds of means (legal, economic, technological, among others) must be provided so that cooperatives develop successful experiences for the women who participate in them and for the members in general. Hence the need to generate a productive fabric that truly contributes to the promotion of women under equal conditions with men, which would be, in short, one of the aspects that make it possible to speak of a certain economic democratization. In this way, the gender perspective is configured as an indicator to evaluate cooperativism and not only to alert to deficiencies in equality between men and women, inasmuch as only in this way will it be possible to unfold the transformative potential that the cooperative regime is attributed.

Today, organizations must adapt to an environment that demands greater equality between men and women. To a greater or lesser extent, public administrations are trying to do so by adopting policies in this area, which in turn constitutes a mechanism of coercion on companies that are increasingly forced to introduce such changes in favor of their legitimacy. In the case of cooperatives, this type of pressure would be, a priori, easily assumed because it is linked to their own identity. However, the fact that many cooperatives still do not guarantee gender equality or that processes of occupational segregation occur, shows that the values on which the gender order is based are too entrenched or institutionalized, causing change to be very slow.

In this sense, it has been key to determine the convergences regarding the participation of women in the CTAs in Spain and in the CNOA in Cuba, from an approach to the legal





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**Conflict of interest:**

Authors declare not to have any conflict of interest.

**Authors' contribution:**

The authors have participated in the writing of the paper and the analysis of the documents.



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