

Libraries and cooperativism: a dialectical view from the principle of cooperative education in the digital era



Bibliotecas y cooperativismo: mirada dialéctica desde el principio de educación cooperativa en la era digital

Bibliotecas e cooperativismo: uma visão dialética a partir do princípio da educação cooperativa na era digital

Ana María Pereda Mirabal¹

¹ Universidad de Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca". Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades. Departamento de Derecho. Pinar del Río, Cuba.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8106-6607>

 anamariapereda5@gmail.com

Received: 29/10/2020

Accepted: 14/12/2020

ABSTRACT

Libraries have historically been centers that generate knowledge. Their social function is essential to guarantee fundamental rights such as access to information, culture and education. They play, therefore, a fundamental role in the educational process of society. The cooperative doctrine has recognized a series of principles that support their operation and seek a balance between their two fundamental components: the social and the economic. Among these, the principle of cooperative education, training and information stands out as a golden rule. Although the library and cooperativism may seem dissonant, they are connected by this principle of cooperative education, since from their functions and dialectic conception, both categories contribute to the continuous training of cooperative members and society in general, a relationship that is resized in the current digital context. Such approaches raise questions about the basis

of this relationship. Therefore, this material aims to argue the relationship between libraries and cooperativism, under the guiding thread of the principle of cooperative education in digital environments. The research is theoretical, with a descriptive approach, so methods such as dialectical-materialistic, analysis-synthesis and inductive-deductive were used to establish the relationship between libraries and cooperativism, under the guiding thread of the principle of cooperative education.

Keywords: libraries; cooperativism; digital environment; principle of cooperative education

RESUMEN

Las bibliotecas históricamente han sido centros generadores de saberes. Su función social es esencial para garantizar derechos fundamentales como el de acceso a la información, la cultura y la educación. Juegan, por ende, un rol fundamental en el proceso educativo de la sociedad. La doctrina cooperativa por su parte ha reconocido una serie de principios que avalan su funcionamiento y persiguen el equilibrio entre sus dos componentes fundamentales: el social y el económico. Dentro de estos, destaca como regla de oro el principio de educación, capacitación e información cooperativa. Aun cuando pueden parecer disonantes la biblioteca y el cooperativismo, encuentran conexión a partir de este principio de educación cooperativa, pues desde sus funciones y concepción dialéctica ambas categorías tributan a la formación continuada de los socios cooperativos y la sociedad en general, relación que se redimensiona en el actual contexto digital. Tales planteamientos provocan cuestionamientos sobre las bases de esta relación. Por ello, el presente material se propone argumentar la relación que existe entre bibliotecas y cooperativismo, bajo el hilo conductor del principio de educación cooperativa en entornos digitales. La investigación es teórica, con enfoque descriptivo, por lo que se emplearon métodos como el dialéctico-materialista, el de análisis-síntesis y el inductivo-deductivo para establecer la relación entre bibliotecas y cooperativismo, bajo el hilo conductor del principio de educación cooperativa.

Palabras clave: bibliotecas; cooperativismo; entorno digital; principio de educación cooperativa

RESUMO

As bibliotecas têm sido historicamente centros geradores de conhecimento. A sua função social é essencial para garantir direitos fundamentais tais como o acesso à informação, cultura e educação. Desempenham, portanto, um papel fundamental no processo educativo da sociedade. A doutrina cooperativa, por seu lado, reconheceu uma série de princípios que apoiam o seu funcionamento e procuram um equilíbrio entre as suas duas componentes fundamentais: a social e a económica. Dentro destes, o princípio da educação, formação e informação cooperativa destaca-se como uma regra de ouro. Ainda que a biblioteca e o cooperativismo possam parecer dissonantes, estão ligados por este princípio da educação cooperativa, porque a partir das suas funções e concepção dialética ambas as categorias contribuem para a formação contínua dos membros da cooperativa e da sociedade em geral, uma relação que é redimensionada no contexto digital atual. Tais abordagens levantam questões sobre a base desta relação. Por esta razão, este material pretende argumentar a relação entre bibliotecas e cooperativismo, sob o fio condutor do princípio da educação cooperativa em ambientes digitais. A investigação é teórica, com uma abordagem descritiva, pelo que foram empregues métodos como dialético-materialista, analítico-síntese e indutivo-dedutivo para estabelecer a relação entre bibliotecas e cooperativismo, sob o fio condutor do princípio da educação cooperativa.

Palavras-chave: bibliotecas; cooperativismo; ambiente digital; princípio da educação cooperativa

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are analog or digital spaces where information is stored and selected and processes of library activity are carried out. Under current conditions, there are several criteria to classify libraries, taking into account the use they make of Information and Communication Technologies and even the social role they play in society.

At the same time, they have a marked social function that contributes to creating fairer and more dignified societies. The scientific, literary and artistic production they manage

and safeguard is a reflection of society's intellectual work and, in turn, is a source that generates new knowledge. These institutions can be found as part of different legal entities, such as associations, foundations, state enterprises, private enterprises, political and mass organizations, cooperatives, etc., without losing their essence as guarantors of fundamental rights such as education and access to culture.

The formation and training actions developed in cooperative environments are nourished by the bibliographic sources found in libraries, specifically in cooperative libraries, which in a specialized way provide these informational services to members.

However, the link between libraries and cooperativism is a peculiar issue, since the relationship of this pair seems to be out of tune. Therefore, several questions arise, namely: What is the incidence of libraries in the cooperative phenomenon? Is it possible for a library to emerge from the initiative of a group of people who associate under the cooperative legal organization? How is cooperative education visualized in the activity of libraries, in the current digital context?

Faced with these and many other questions that can be asked, this article aims to argue the relationship between libraries and cooperativism, under the guiding thread of the principle of cooperative education, training and information in digital environments. It starts, therefore, from the theoretical analysis of the social function of libraries as institutions that guarantee access to culture and cooperativism as a socioeconomic movement to establish the points of contact between them, on the basis of cooperative education as the golden rule of cooperativism and the changes originated by the process of digitalization of knowledge.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Being a theoretical research, with a descriptive approach, it is based on the dialectical-materialist method, as a guiding method of knowledge that allows the systemic study of the object of research and the foundation and integration of the other methods used, such as the analysis-synthesis and inductive-deductive methods. These two methods at the theoretical level made it possible to establish the links between libraries and cooperativism, concepts that constitute the center of analysis of the study carried out.

Specifically, the analysis-synthesis method made possible the characterization and integration of the categories under study: libraries and cooperativism, based on the approach of axiological constructs that are found in the substratum of cooperative theory. Likewise, it facilitated the examination of the social function of library institutions.

The inductive-deductive approach made it possible to establish generalizations from concrete aspects related to cooperative principles and the social function of libraries, while at the same time it contributed to determine what is common in the individualities of library and cooperative activity, making it possible to make deductions and particularize again the relationship between these two categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Role and social responsibility of libraries in the landscape of social and cultural life

Libraries are considered institutions that satisfy the needs of man as a social being and contribute to provide cultural values or meanings. The service they provide in society allows them to intervene in the process of community transformation, based on social participation.

Their social, cultural and historical function is essential to create fair and inclusive societies. Consequently, they constitute spaces for recreation, knowledge acquisition and respect for values such as dignity and justice.

Their historical role is unquestionable and their leading role as guarantors of the right of access to knowledge, education and culture in general is indisputable. Their function in the custody, dissemination and preservation of the cultural heritage of nations has been a constant in the different periods of humanity.

The process of digitization of knowledge has expanded and diversified library activity. Nowadays, the so-called online libraries are gaining prominence, if we start from the premise that they contribute to a better access to culture and are more in line with the technology of contemporary society. Digitization as a process has made it possible to

make texts accessible to the public for consultation from any place, at any time and simultaneously, even if it is the same copy. Likewise, it has offered the possibility of preserving and conserving unique, rare, deteriorated or deteriorating documents.

Technological tools have allowed the diversification of its services. Examples include the creation of digital collections and thematic guides, the creation of online catalogs, text and data mining, the development of open access policies and the service of access through the sending of digital copies. All of which have made them protagonists in the process of knowledge dissemination.

As physical or virtual spaces, libraries have an important social role that is evidenced in their capacity to welcome, to provide a free service to all, to be able to interact with their peers, to facilitate access to information and to enable users to use intellectual creation works for different purposes (Gallo León, 2020). The above reaffirms the idea that these institutions are the bridge between creators and individuals, by facilitating the dissemination of works, access to knowledge and information, elements that integrate the so-called right to culture and education (Pereda Mirabal, 2018).

In pandemic times, the role and social responsibility of libraries in digital environments is enhanced. Remote access to their collections enables the psychosocial support of communities by making wholesome entertainment materials and reliable scientific literature available to users. The free downloading of works through the network has contributed to mitigate the negative effects of social isolation (Alonso & Frederico, 2020).

Cooperative education: "the golden rule of cooperativism"

Authors such as Imen (2019, pp. 177-178) argue that "the cooperative phenomenon is directly proportional to the collective experience of humanity, (...). Men as social beings historically have sought various associative forms from their own conditions, the multiplicity of paths, creations and struggles".

As an associative form, the cooperative has two basic elements that define its functioning. The first is social, identified with the group of individuals who associate to meet their own needs, and the second is economic, identified with the business activity that will serve as a channel to meet those needs (Mendoza Pérez et al., 2018).

Cooperative activity is developed on the basis of principles that guarantee the cooperation and responsibility of its members. It is consequently argued that "cooperativism is a socioeconomic model that, since the history of the Rochdale Pioneers, has considered education as a fundamental principle for its development." (Figarella Garcia, 2019, p. 162)

According to the International Cooperative Alliance (Aci, 1995, cited in Odriozola and Palma, 2018, p. 83), the fifth principle is that of cooperative education, training and information and consists of the following:

(...) cooperatives contribute to the education and training of their members so that they can effectively contribute to their development. It is necessary for members to be trained, mainly in cooperativism, to contribute efficiently to the management of the cooperative from the decision-making point of view. They must also inform the public of the particularities and benefits of cooperativism, as well as its principles and values.

Based on these minimums, cooperative education has been defined by Marín de León et al. (2013, p. 63) as: The process of continuous training for the creation of skills and competencies, which allows ensuring an organizational culture, based on solidarity, autonomy and responsibility, promoting the values and principles of cooperativism, in such a way as to consolidate the economic and social management of the cooperative as a socially owned enterprise, where the sense of belonging and comprehensive training are encouraged.

Cooperative education in its essence leads or should lead to form individuals who respond to the objectives of the entity, the community and society. In addition, to strengthen values in the human being, to create humanistic modes of conduct, to reinforce the sense of belonging and to contribute to the realization of the socioeconomic essence of the institution.

Based on the foregoing, it should be noted that the principle under analysis introduces a humanistic feeling that resizes the actions of the cooperative activity, taking it beyond the strictly economic aspect. Teaching principles and values that guarantee solidarity,

responsibility and equality, while satisfying the economic and spiritual needs of the individual, the essence of cooperativism, contributes to foster feelings of trust, sympathy and respect for the cooperativist model.

Giving due value to cooperative education in the processes of formation, organization and consolidation is imperative for the practical effectiveness of the golden rule of cooperativism. The activities developed by cooperative education must be accompanied by the corresponding awareness processes, in which the principles and values that this principle seeks to promote are unleashed (Álvarez Rodríguez, 2017).

The phenomenon of cooperativism is not new in the country, as there are experiences in the agrarian sector; However, the possibility of expanding it to other sectors of the Cuban economic reality, imposes the need for a resizing of the thinking of actors of the national economy and imposes the need for a cooperative education, which allows promoting the cooperative identity in the country.

In this regard, authors such as Díaz López, Santana Santana and Torga Hernández (2020, p. 14) reflect and conclude that:

(...) it deserves special attention, in terms of cooperative education, to consider that it is urgent, on national soil, especially in the environment of non-agro livestock cooperatives, to promote and promote training on the benefits or otherwise of the cooperative, the characteristics of this new economic actor, the new relationships that exist among members, who are no longer workers of a state enterprise where the administration and its administrators converge.

In general, it is considered that this education process should be continuous, with special emphasis on cooperative values and principles. Training and education actions should not only focus on the economic aspect, but should also strengthen the social sphere. It can be said that "the more educated, trained and informed the members are, the better the socioeconomic results of the cooperatives will be" (García Pedraza et al., 2018, p. 7).

Cooperative libraries: their role in members' education and training

Education as a continuous process of formation drinks directly from the bibliographic collection of libraries. Entities that have resized their actions in the digital era to offer the most diverse services in order to strengthen social humanism.

The cooperative phenomenon, aware of the importance of education, has fostered the work of libraries in the realization of cooperative education. In this sense, the fact that libraries operate independently at the headquarters of the cooperatives or that the library arises at the initiative of a group of individuals who adopt the legal organization of a cooperative for its operation, and even that there is a cooperative library that functions as one more service that the cooperative provides to the member, is not alien (Chiriello, 1979).

The idea of libraries at the cooperative goes back to the pioneers of Rochdale. Aware of the need to educate their members in a broad sense, in the year 1850, they converted their newsroom into a library containing 2200 volumes of the best published, including the most expensive of the time. Members had free access and could read free of charge 12 hours a day. In 1862, they already accumulated 5000 books, received 14 daily newspapers and 32 weekly and monthly newspapers, representing all political and religious opinions (Villalba Giménez, 2016).

Libraries created by the initiative of cooperative members or cooperative libraries are distinguished by having a level of specialization in cooperativism. The collections are made up of materials that, from a scientific point of view, study or deal with the cooperative phenomenon and, in a general sense, there are the works of the cooperative classics.

This type of library contributes directly to formal and non-formal cooperative education. Training courses, improvement programs, events, workshops, educational talks and dissemination of cooperative principles and values, both within the cooperative and the community environment, will find doctrinal and bibliographic support in the materials found in these specialized libraries.

Cooperative libraries will not only participate in the education of their members, family members and employees, but will also provide an educational service to the individuals of the society where they are located. This participation will be evident in the incorporation of bibliographic funds that will be useful in the teaching processes undertaken by their members and also in those that are developed in educational entities.

It can be summarized that the existence of cooperative libraries where the library becomes one more service provided to the member, the potential users will be the members. They will be able to channel their reading, research and leisure needs through the library services. Among the materials to be consulted, most of them will be the cooperative scientific production, from which the members will be continuously nourished, providing the education and training process with the continuous character to which the cooperative praxis aspires.

On the other hand, the immateriality of the network has demanded a change in library activity in order to reduce the technological and informational illiteracy of its users. In cooperative environments, likewise, the changes associated with new technologies have demanded training for cooperative members and their families in the face of the diversification of business models.

It can be said that in the face of the challenges imposed by the digitization of knowledge, library cooperation has gained prominence, a phenomenon that has extended to those libraries that are in cooperatives. Libraries, in order to fulfill their role, have developed online cooperation projects that have allowed the education, training and information of their members.

Assuming the changes imposed by digital technology, library cooperation has been aimed at: jointly developing electronic information sources, providing online access to catalogs, databases and web pages, developing data exchange projects between publishers and libraries, making public and interlibrary digital loans, promoting professional cooperation through the programming of courses and putting them online, the dissemination of professional journals and newsletters, as well as developing work tools, catalogs, publications, standards, statistics, etc. (Merlo Vega, 1999).

The aspects discussed so far allow to conclude that the cooperative phenomenon is committed to a superior model where the spiritual and economic needs of a group of individuals, who voluntarily decide to associate, are solved. The fundamental principle that governs the cooperative activity is that of education, training and cooperative information. This principle gives a superior humanistic character to the cooperative movement.

In a general sense, digitization has influenced the activity of libraries and diversified their services and structure. In the modern era, it is usual for them to become virtual environments, although without totally disappearing as analogical spaces. The solidarity and cooperation between different libraries allows them to have more complete collections, to enjoy greater visibility in society and specifically to have an updated bibliographic source that serves as a basis for the education, training and information of their members.

REFERENCES

Alonso, M. L., & Frederico, A. (2020). El rol de las bibliotecas en tiempos de COVID-19: Reflexiones y propuestas. *Desde el Sur*, 12(1), 241-262.

<https://doi.org/10.21142/DES-1201-2020-0015>

Álvarez Rodríguez, J. F. (2017). *Economía social y solidaridad en el territorio: Significantes y co-construcción de políticas públicas*. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.

<https://www.javeriana.edu.co/documents/16113/9477233/N+2+Econom%C3%ADa+social+y+solidaria+en+el+territorio+%28WEB%29.pdf/c5355176-c247-4a91-99d3-2a7748164495>

Chiriello, A. (1979). Bibliotecas cooperativas. *Revista Idelcoop*, 6(20).

<https://www.idelcoop.org.ar/revista/20/bibliotecas-cooperativas>

Díaz López, A., Santana Santana, L., & Torga Hernández, N. (2020). Enseñanza del Derecho Cooperativo y Educación Cooperativa. ¿Un par dialéctico? *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo*, 8(1), 7-18.

<http://coodes.upr.edu.cu/index.php/coodes/article/view/225>

- Figarella García, F. (2019). Educación cooperativista: Cinco principios pedagógicos para una experiencia educativa coherente y significativa. *Revista Idelcoop*, (229), 158-169. <https://www.idelcoop.org.ar/revista/229/educacion-cooperativista-cinco-principios-pedagogicos-una-experiencia-educativa>
- Gallo León, J. P. (2020). Retrofuturismo en tiempos de Covid-19: Cómo las predicciones catastrofistas del pasado nos ayudan en el presente. *Anuario ThinkEPI*, 14(e14b02), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.3145/thinkepi.2020.e14b02>
- García Pedraza, L., García Ruiz, J. G., & Figueras Matos, D. (2018). Importancia de la educación cooperativa. Una experiencia cubana. *REVESCO. Revista de Estudios Cooperativos*, 129, 142-160. <https://doi.org/10.5209/REVE.62881>
- Imen, P. (2019). Simón Rodríguez y el cooperativismo. *Revista Idelcoop*, (229), 170-188. <https://www.idelcoop.org.ar/revista/229/simon-rodriguez-y-cooperativismo>
- Marín de León, I., Labrador Machín, O., & Mirabal González, Y. (2013). La Educación Cooperativa como eje central para la formación integral en el sector cooperativo. *Cooperativismo y Desarrollo*, 1(1), 55-66. <http://coodes.upr.edu.cu/index.php/coodes/article/view/32>
- Mendoza Pérez, J. C., Alonso Betancourt, E. de la C., Londres Osorio, M. D., Matos Rey, I., & Hechavarría Castillo, R. (2018). Análisis legislativo del régimen económico y social de las cooperativas no agropecuarias en Cuba. *Revista Caribeña de Ciencias Sociales*. <https://www.eumed.net/rev/caribe/2018/01/regimen-economico-social.html>
- Merlo Vega, J. A. (1999). La cooperación en las bibliotecas universitarias: Fundamentos y redes cooperativas. *Boletín de la Asociación Andaluza de Bibliotecarios*, 14(54), 33-58. <https://www.aab.es/app/download/31606386/Bolet%C3%ADn+n+54+marzo+1999.pdf>

Odriozola Guitart, S., & Palma Arnaud, A. R. (2018). Cooperativas no agropecuarias en el sector de la construcción en La Habana: Un análisis de su gestión. *Economía y Desarrollo*, 159(1), 80-96.

http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0252-85842018000100006

Pereda Mirabal, A. M. (2018). Límites al derecho de autor en favor de las bibliotecas digitales como presupuesto del derecho fundamental de acceso a la cultura. *Revista La Propiedad Inmaterial*, (25), 123-140.

<https://doi.org/10.18601/16571959.n25.06>

Villalba Giménez, J. B. (2016). Actividades educativas de los Pioneros de Rochdale y sus implicancias para las cooperativas actuales. *Revista Científica de la UCSA*, 3(1), 31-39. [https://doi.org/10.18004/ucsa/2409-8752/2016.003\(01\)031-039](https://doi.org/10.18004/ucsa/2409-8752/2016.003(01)031-039)

Conflict of interest:

Authors declare not to have any conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution:

Ana María Pereda Mirabal designed the study, analyzed the data and prepared the draft, was involved in the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data, reviewed the writing of the manuscript and approved the version finally submitted.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Copyright (c) Ana María Pereda Mirabal