

Editorial

Cooperative Education as a development strategy in the International Year of Cooperatives



La Educación Cooperativa como estrategia de desarrollo en el Año Internacional de las Cooperativas

A educação cooperativa como estratégia de desenvolvimento no Ano Internacional das Cooperativas

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Since the origins of cooperativism and throughout its evolution, many contributions and ideas have been developed regarding educational processes for training in this sector and, in some cases, concrete actions to develop Cooperative Education, as referred to by authors such as: Mateo Blanco (1976), Alfonso Alemán (2003), Marín de León et al. (2013), García Pedraza et al. (2018), Hernández Arteaga et al. (2018), Juárez Pulido et al. (2019); Martínez Charterina (2020) and Imen (2021).

Although these authors express different points of view on aspects related to Cooperative Education, they all recognize the importance of Education as an essential tool for putting cooperative ideas into practice, disseminating knowledge of the cooperative system, and training cooperative members with a view to consolidating the sector and transforming the quality of life of all its members (Lorenzo Cabezas et al., 2022).

Cooperative education as a guiding principle of the cooperativization process, from 1848 to the present, has been analyzed by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), which considers it to be

the foundation of the ideological training of cooperative members, setting the cooperative system apart from other sectors of the economy (Lorenzo Cabezas et al., 2022).

In its conception and definition, it went through four stages: first, in 1848 with the founding of the Rochdale Pioneers, where education was established as a principle for the first time in the history of the movement. Then, in 1937, at an ICA Congress, the cooperative principles were updated and Cooperative Education was approved as the seventh principle; however, it was not given the importance that this principle requires for the sector, with greater emphasis being placed on the economic principles. At the 1966 Congress, the principle of Cooperative Education was not among the ICA's priorities as a guiding principle that should guide the cooperative movement at all times. It was not until the ICA Congress in Manchester in 1995 that the guiding principles of the cooperative movement were revised and it was decided to include this principle. In addition, the importance of training and information as a systematic and continuous process is highlighted (International Cooperative Alliance, 1995).

Cooperative education is conceived as a process of continuous training aimed at developing skills, which ensures the comprehensive management of the cooperative, based on the values and principles of cooperativism, in such a way as to consolidate its economic and social management as a socialist socially-owned enterprise, where a sense of belonging and the comprehensive training of members, managers, workers, families, the community, other members of the locality, and all persons linked to the sector (Marín de León et al., 2013).

Its functions contribute to strengthening this model and enable it to become a real path to development by promoting the transfer of behavioral norms in line with the cooperative culture, the preservation of the basic ideas of the cooperative process and their updating in current conditions, the socialization of learning through feedback from participants in the process, the homogenization of knowledge from different points of view to become a regularity, the development of leadership as an indispensable requirement and distinctive feature of management in cooperative enterprises, as well as the establishment of programs that are adapted to the characteristics of the sector (Marín de León et al., 2013).

To fulfill these functions, cooperative education is carried out through the development of training activities within the framework of non-formal education, with workshops, courses, debates, events, and other educational activities based on the principles of popular education, or through the

development of educational activities linked to structured programs that are integrated into formal education (Marín de León et al., 2013).

The actions described above must reflect the context of each locality where the cooperatives are located, and must correspond to the needs of the members, employees, managers, families, community, and other sectors involved with the cooperatives, giving greater relevance within the training process to the community and its development as a decisive factor for the progress of the movement, so that generational renewal and the transformation of their reality can be guaranteed (Lorenzo Cabezas et al., 2022).

In this sense, cooperative education emerges as a strategic component for enhancing the impact of the cooperative model on community development, hence, there is evidence of a synergistic and bidirectional relationship between the two processes, where each component strengthens the other in a cycle of social transformation, and whose core relationship is based on shared values such as democratic participation, equity and social justice, sustainability, autonomy and self-management, and solidarity and reciprocity.

Hence, cooperative education is a key tool for strengthening social cohesion, democratic participation, and the economic sustainability of communities in a global context marked by social, environmental, and technological challenges.

Meanwhile, community development is a process that strengthens the participation and organization of the population in the search for their own solutions to improve their locality, under the principles of cooperativeness, mutual aid, and collectivity (Macías Reyes, 2013), where the construction of social capital, the generation of productive enterprises, and citizen participation are significant elements within the process.

Cooperative education acts as a catalyst for community processes by promoting social cohesion through trust and cooperation, facilitating the creation of sustainable collective enterprises, strengthening democratic governance in local organizations, and integrating the environmental and digital dimensions into capacity building. Its strategic nature lies in the fact that it is not limited to transmitting competencies, but transforms social and economic relations, generating more resilient and participatory communities, so its effectiveness depends on its integration into community processes.

It transcends technical training by aligning itself with endogenous development and capacity-building approaches to enhance local resources and abilities for community transformation, foster trust and support networks and cooperation among local actors, promote collective economic initiatives with a sustainable focus, encourage shared decision-making and community governance, and facilitate the integration of vulnerable groups into productive and organizational processes.

In the context of the International Year of Cooperatives, cooperative education is consolidating its position as a theoretical and practical strategy for community development. Its main contribution is the construction of solidarity-based citizenship and the generation of collective capacities that enable contemporary challenges to be addressed from an inclusive and sustainable perspective.

It is an effective community development strategy, combining training, collective action, and sustainability, aspects that reaffirm its role as a tool for strengthening communities, generating productive enterprises, and promoting values of solidarity and democracy.

Furthermore, it confirms the importance of cooperativism as an economic and social model capable of responding to contemporary challenges: inequality, climate crisis, social exclusion, and digital transformation. In this scenario, cooperative education is presented as a strategic axis for training citizens in solidarity, responsible entrepreneurship, and resilient communities.

Although the International Year of Cooperatives reaffirms the significance of cooperative education for community development, the cooperative movement must take on challenges related to adapting cooperative education to the digital age and new forms of work; ensuring sustainable financing for educational programs; and systematically evaluating their impact on the Sustainable Development Goals.

In this regard, the design of cooperative curricula adapted to local and digital contexts, the promotion of participatory methodologies and field practices, establishing community impact assessment systems linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, fostering partnerships between local governments, universities, and cooperative movements, and ensuring the financial sustainability of educational programs are essential ways to address current challenges so that cooperative education remains a key element in community development.

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