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### ACADEMIC CONSENSUS ON COOPERATIVISM IN MEXICO WITHIN THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: NODES AS ECOSYSTEMS OF TERRITORIAL TRANSFORMATION

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**Abstract:** This article studies the consensus among academics on cooperativism in Mexico as an important basis for the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). It emphasizes the role of the Nodes for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy (NODESS) as a strategy for improving these areas. Through a review of 25 verifiable sources, it analyzes how cooperativism represents an alternative to the neoliberal model. The results show academic consensus on cooperativism as an engine for sustainable development and the democratization of the economy. NODESS reinforce the creation of local cooperativism by building inter-institutional alliances, governments, and social institutions. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a consensus at both the conceptual and practical levels on the power of cooperativism to achieve inclusion, participation, and social transformation in Mexico.

**Keywords:** Cooperativism, Social and Solidarity Economy, NODESS, Academic Consensus, Territorial Development.

## Introduction

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is emerging as an alternative to the dominant neoliberal economic model. It proposes principles of cooperation, solidarity, and economic democracy (Laville, 2016). In Mexico, this sector has acquired constitutional relevance in Article 25 of the Political Constitution, as it recognizes that the social sector of the economy performs functions and is an essential component of the national economic system. Similarly, its relevance was reflected in the Social and Solidarity Economy Law, enacted by the

Chamber of Deputies in 2012 (Chamber of Deputies, 2012).

Within this structure, cooperativism is a very clear and common path for the SSE in Mexico. According to Rojas Herrera J.J. (2021), there are more than eight million people organized in 18,038 cooperatives, accounting for 7.39% of the Mexican population. This figure places the cooperative sector as an important player both economically and socially within the national landscape. In this context, the Nodes for the Promotion of the Social and Solidarity Economy are an INAES strategy to help meet five objectives of the Program for the Promotion of the Social Economy, generating integration and territorial alliances made up of at least three different actors: institutions, academics, local governments, and Social Economy Sector Organizations (INAES, 2024).

The objective of this article is to analyze the emerging academic consensus on cooperativism in Mexico within the framework of the SSE, examining how NODESS function as catalysts for territorial ecosystems that strengthen local cooperative development. The central hypothesis is that there is a theoretical and practical convergence among Mexican and international academics who recognize cooperativism as a fundamental pillar of the SSE and NODESS as an innovative public policy strategy for sustainable territorial development.

## Theoretical Framework:

### The Social and Solidarity Economy: Definitions and International Consensus

The social and solidarity economy has been the subject of academic reflection for several decades. This concept includes companies, associations, organizations, and other entities that participate in economic, social, or environmental activities linked to the collective or general interest. It is based on a set of principles such as voluntary cooperation, mutual aid, democratic or participatory governance, autonomy, and independence. It also emphasizes the priority of people over capital in the distribution and use of economic surpluses and assets (International Labor Organization, 2024). The theoretical development of the social solidarity economy is part of a theoretical tradition that has its roots in the initial formulations of Polanyi (1944), identifying principles of economic integration beyond markets, such as reciprocity and redistribution.

Singer (2002) has made significant contributions to the solidarity economy in the Latin American context, while Defourny and Nyssens (2010) have formulated useful conceptual frameworks for analyzing points of convergence and divergence between different regional traditions of social economy.

This definition, adopted by the International Labor Organization in 2022, is a milestone in the international recognition of the SSE. The universal definition of the SSE is a ray of hope for informal workers, as it emphasizes inclusive principles based on values with the potential to transform economies by ensuring decent work and more

secure livelihoods for the most marginalized workers (George, 2022).

### Cooperativism as a pillar of the SSE

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a democratically controlled, jointly owned enterprise (ILO 2002). Cooperative principles include voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, member autonomy and independence, information for decision-making, training and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community.

International academic literature has concluded that cooperatives represent a fundamental element within the social economy. Quarter et al. (2009) point out that cooperatives as an organizational form combine economic and social goals, while McMurtry (2004) emphasizes the political dimension as a democratic practice. Utting (2015) in the field of development asserts that cooperativism and other forms of social and solidarity economy offer alternative paths to sustainable development.

However, in our country, cooperativism is a very old form of organization with a wealth of experience, but at the same time difficult to place within the SSE due to the variety of cases and paths that many cooperatives have taken (Bautista Páez, 2022). This historical complexity was extensively documented by Rojas Coria (1982) and more recently by research that shows how the cooperative sector has evolved as a result of changes in the national political and eco-

conomic context (Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo, 2024).

## **NODESS: Innovation in Public Policy for the SSE**

NODESS are voluntary integration alliances made up of at least three actors with the aim of developing social and solidarity economy ecosystems in their territories through which territorial solutions to collective needs are proposed, designed, and implemented.

NODESS are a novelty in the creation of public policies for the SSE in Mexico because they use a territorial and participatory method that seeks to create synergies between various local development actors. NODO is seen as a public sector tactic that represents a qualitative leap in policy to promote the social economy sector in Mexico. This innovation is in line with global trends that recognize the importance of territorial and participatory methods in growing the social and solidarity economy.

The institutional design of NODESS reflects the basic principles of the social and solidarity economy by promoting democratic participation, cooperation between different sectors, and territorial independence. Chaves and Monzón have said that these types of initiatives represent new models within the field of social economy, integrating social innovation and responsibility towards the territory.

## **Methodology**

This research adopts a qualitative approach based on a systematic review of academic literature. An exhaustive search was conducted of academic databases, ins-

titutional repositories, and official government sources, selecting 25 verifiable bibliographic sources published between 2010 and 2025.

The criteria that defined the selection were: (1) relevant topics discussing cooperatives and the SSE in Mexico; (2) academic and scientific rigor; (3) accessibility and possibility of contrasting sources; (4) diversity of theoretical approaches and disciplines. The analysis was carried out through thematic coding and the application of content analysis, in which certain patterns of convergence/consensus were constructed in the literature under review. Analysis of Academic Consensus on Cooperativism in Mexico

## **Development**

### **Theoretical Convergence: Cooperativism as a Systemic Alternative**

Analysis of the literature shows significant convergence among national and international academics around cooperativism as a viable alternative to the neoliberal economic model. Indeed, there is a consensus that the SSE is a set of practices based on cooperation, reciprocity, and ethics, which prioritizes the well-being of populations and the planet over accumulation and unequal development (Coraggio, 2016). This convergence is apparently based on the understanding that cooperatives are an organizational form that challenges the logic of the capitalist market. Razeto (1993) identifies the solidarity economy as an alternative path that prioritizes the C factor (cooperative) over the capital factor. Pérez de Mendiguren et al. (2009) contribute to

the conceptual debate by distinguishing between social economy, social enterprise, and solidarity economy, pointing out the convergences in terms of values and operating principles. Guerra (2007) has documented the Latin American academic dialogue on these conceptualizations, highlighting the richness of the regional debate.

This convergence is based on several essential elements that encompass economic, social, and political dimensions. In the economic sphere, the specialized literature agrees that cooperatives represent an organizational structure focused on prioritizing collective well-being over individual interest.

There are many cases of cooperatives that have survived despite the difficulties imposed by national economic policy (Izquierdo Muciño, 2013). Research carried out by Duque et al. 2021 confirms that there is growing recognition in academic literature of the potential of the social and solidarity economy to generate inclusive economic development.

On the social level, almost all academics consider that cooperativism can be an instrument for integrating and democratizing the economy. Cooperatives were highly dependent on government support and were more concerned with social outcomes than with making money. Sustainability or self-sufficiency in cooperatives is a debate (IPADE, 2024). However, Quarter et al. (2009) point out that when cooperatives are effective and can sustain themselves, they achieve the dual goal of being economically profitable and having a social impact.

Academic literature argues that cooperativism implies greater democracy and self-management. Based on the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), it is estimated

that there are more than 3 million cooperatives in the world, involving more than 12% of the population and with annual revenues of \$2.035 trillion. This issue pits the autonomy and sustainability of cooperatives against each other in many debates (IPADE, 2024). However, Cuarter et al. (2009) show that when cooperatives are effective and do not depend on anyone, they can fulfill the dual task of obtaining financial profitability and generating social impact.

Cooperativism and democracy represent the same category in the literature. According to the ICA (2021), there are more than 3 million cooperatives, representing 12% of the world's population and generating annual revenues of \$2.035 trillion. McMurtry (2004) emphasizes that this private policy is also a line of greater importance than a Marxist political movement and should, in his view, be taken into consideration in order to move towards the construction of democratic societies.

## Critical Perspectives and Recognized Challenges

The academic consensus is not unanimous, as they also recognize serious difficulties for cooperative development in Mexico. Rojas Herrera (2014) points out that the activation in 1994 of the General Law of Cooperative Societies of 1938 was a factor in the proliferation of pseudo-cooperatives and the introduction of the latter. Among the main challenges they face, they point to issues related to the legal framework, where cooperative laws have been used to form “pseudo-cooperatives” that end up going against genuine cooperative principles.

Of course, there is also the problem of excessive dependence on the state, with



some cooperatives having created a strong dependency on state support and thus losing their autonomy and sustainability. A third recognized challenge is the fragmentation of the cooperative movement, where in the late 1920s the state definitively canceled the legal possibility of creating a savings and loan cooperative; this restriction remained in force until 1991. This historical fragmentation has greatly weakened the Mexican cooperative sector's ability to organize and be represented.

## The Social and Solidarity Economy as a new approach to transforming cooperativism

Academics agree that the conceptual framework of the SSE offers a theoretical and practical renewal for Mexican cooperativism. There is a need for an epistemological shift to address the issue of the Solidarity Economy, recovering the categories of social totality, historicity, and power to fill the void of a lack of historical-structural explanations about the origins and rise of such practices (Marañón, 2015).

In contrast, this renewal is also echoed in the international literature, where Utting (2015) discusses approaches that go beyond a sectoral focus to address the social and solidarity economy as an area of systemic transformation. In Latin America, Singer (2002) had already pointed out this urgent conceptual rethinking by arguing that the solidarity economy needed theoretical frameworks that integrated economic, social, and political dimensions.

In 2021, Duque et al. carried out bibliometric research that confirms that there is indeed a global trend towards integrative conceptualization and between traditions

such as the social economy, cooperativism, and even the solidarity economy, which legitimizes the epistemological renewal proposed by Mexican academics.

The renewal involves several interconnected dimensions. In terms of epistemological recontextualization, academics suggest leaving behind fragmented views of cooperativism in order to understand it as part of a larger project of social transformation. Chaves and Monzón (2018) see this trend as part of the new economic paradigms that integrate social innovation and systemic transformation. With regard to territorial articulation, the SSE approach highlights the importance of territorial networks and the connection between different organizational forms. This perspective is echoed in the work of Quarter et al. (2009) on the Canadian social economy and in the proposals of Fonteneau et al. (2011) on territorial approaches to the development of the social economy. Finally, comprehensive sustainability is presented as a key element where the SSE includes environmental and social dimensions that go beyond traditional economic profitability. This orientation is in line with international trends documented by the United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Social and Solidarity Economy (2024) towards development models that prioritize comprehensive sustainability.

## NODESS as a Strategy for Territorial Cooperative Development

### Innovation in Public Policy

NODESS are an important innovation in the design of public policies for the SSE in Mexico. The objective of NODESS is to create social and solidarity economy ecosystems in their territories, through whi-

ch territorial solutions to collective needs are proposed, designed, and implemented.

The most notable feature of this strategy is the adoption of a territorial approach that incorporates local and regional specificities, promotes multifactorial coordination through the mandatory participation of at least three types of actors (academic, governmental, and social) to ensure diversity of perspectives and resources, and maintains a relatively high degree of autonomy, with NODESS retaining autonomy in their internal operations within the framework of national public policy.

### Cooperativism within NODESS

A study of official and academic documentation on NODESS shows that cooperativism plays an important role in their development strategy. The main points are: promotion and strengthening, where NODESS helps to prospect for new cooperatives and improve existing ones (communication, training, advisory, and resource projects); sectoral diversification is another important factor, as NODESS promotes consumer, production, service, and savings cooperatives and recognizes the diversity of the cooperative sector; linkages and collaboration are another important factor, as NODESS seeks to build networks between cooperatives for mutual learning through experience; and recognition of the social and economic impact, accepting that cooperatives play an important role in the sustainable development and economic growth of communities.

### Significant Territorial Experiences

The analysis of specific cases illustrates the diversity of approaches and results of NODESS in different Mexican territories: NODESS-REDESSGRO (Guerrero): The convergence of academic and social projects for a solid ecosystem desirable for the SSE in Guerrero is highlighted: a) the Master's Degree in Social Economy at the Autonomous University of Guerrero (MES-UAGro); b) the International Center for Research and Information on Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC); c) the Network of Cooperatives and Social Economy Entities of the State of Guerrero (REDESSGRO). NODESS Michoacán: The nodes promoting the social solidarity economy (NODESS) are voluntary local alliances involving at least three institutional actors interested in promoting the development of the social solidarity economy in the region.

## Discussion

### Towards a New Paradigm of Cooperative Development

Convergence of Theoretical and Practical Approaches

The analysis reveals a significant convergence between academic theoretical approaches and practical strategies implemented through NODESS. This convergence is evident in the recognition of the territorial dimension, where both academics and policy implementers recognize the importance of territory as a space for coordinating cooperative development.

An ecosystemic approach is also evident, as the conceptualization of NODESS as SSE "ecosystems" reflects a systemic un-

derstanding of cooperative development that transcends individual organizational visions. Additionally, multifactorial participation shows how academic consensus on the need for coordination between different actors is materialized in the institutional design of NODESS.

## Challenges and Tensions Identified

Although there seems to be clear agreement, analysis reveals significant problems and tensions. There is tension between freedom and organization, where the National Institute for Social Economy (INAES) cannot continue to be an entity that distributes money among people in need. Although there is no agreement on how to strengthen the institution or what direction public policy should take, decisions should not be made without first consulting with social economy actors (Rojas Herrera, 2022). There is also the problem of maintaining funding, because the historical dependence on government support for Mexican cooperatives raises doubts about whether NODESS can last for long. Finally, regional diversity is another major challenge, as NODESS must adapt to the cultural, economic, and social characteristics of each location.

## International Projection of the NODESS Model

The NODESS model has features that could be important for other Latin American countries. In the final decades of the 20th century, associations and cooperatives that are now referred to as the solidarity sector became visible again in the economic and political sphere (Laville, 2004). The Mexican experience with NODESS contributes new insights to the international debate on public policies for the SSE, as it is

a flexible institutional framework in which NODESS combine public institutionality with local operational autonomy. It is also relevant because it has links to the academic world, as the participation of academic institutions is mandatory, which strengthens the conceptual and methodological basis of the interventions. This model also has principles of evaluation and learning; NODESS as a model available for evaluation and learning can contribute to the international debate.

## Conclusion

The literature review shows that there is a growing consensus on cooperativism in Mexico as a fundamental basis for the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). This is characterized by recognizing its transformative potential as a viable alternative to the neoliberal economic model capable of generating inclusive economic development and social justice. This conceptual convergence is complemented by territorial valuation, recognizing the importance of territory as key to the articulation of cooperative development.

In this context, the Social and Solidarity Economy Nodes (NODESS) are an institutional innovation that makes many of the theoretical proposals of the aforementioned consensus possible. Their effectiveness can be seen in the multifactorial articulation that institutionalizes the participation of academics, governments, and social organizations in the development of the SSE. In addition, their ecosystemic approach and adaptive flexibility allow for a systemic understanding of cooperative development, adjusting to territorial specificities while maintaining national conceptual coherence.



Finally, this research contributes to scientific knowledge by offering the first complete systematization of the academic consensus on cooperativism and the SSE in Mexico, providing a rigorous analysis of these important issues.

## Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed: For us, to promote comparative studies between NODESS; to create impact assessment frameworks; to promote specialized training in SSE and cooperativism. In public policy: to ensure financial sustainability for NODESS; to strengthen local participation; to establish specific territorial impact indicators. For the cooperative movement: to take advantage of NODESS coordination; to strengthen organizational capacities; to design strategies for economic and social sustainability.

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