

A Proposal For A Conceptual Definition Of Cooperativism Based On A Bibliometric Study

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Abstract

This Study Aimed To Present A Proposal For A Conceptual Definition Of Cooperativism Based On Scientific Production. The Conceptual Bibliographic Method Was Used In Its Four Stages: 1) Formulation Of The Problem And Response Pattern, 2) Data Collection In The Google Scholar Scientific Base, 3) Organization Of Data Based On Semantic Analysis, And 4) Presentation Of The Answers Sought. The Results Showed Five Equivalence Terms (Doctrine, Form, Relationship, Production, And Association) And 29 Attributes, Which Were Grouped Into Five Semantic Groups That Characterize Cooperativism: Participatory Relationship, Equality As A Value, Shared Challenges, Appreciation Of Substantivity, More Social Rather Than Economic And Problem-Solving Culture. The Conclusion Proposes That Cooperativism Can Be Defined As A Production System In Which Its Members Face Challenges And Solve Problems With Cooperation As The Main Instrument.

Keywords: *Cooperativism, Conceptual Definition, Conceptual Bibliographic Method, Bibliometric Study*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Cooperative organizations practice a doctrine centered on cooperation, as suggested by many studies (Handayani et al., 2023; Sambuo, 2023; Nejari & Hassine, 2023; Imaz et al., 2023). Cooperativism is this doctrine (Furlanetto et al., 2023; Kauko, 2023; Pierini, 2023). Countless other studies have even made discoveries that allow the formulation of the hypothesis of evolution of the competition environment, which goes through a stage of co-competition, to reach the era of cooperation (Kark et al., 2023; Meena et al., 2023; Demuyne et al., 2023; Ton et al., 2023; Manzhynski & Biedenbach, 2023). Likely, contemporary organizations are increasingly operating in co-competitive schemes, unlike cooperative organizations that have practiced the cooperative doctrine since their foundation. This is an important issue from a scientific point of view because it suggests the possibility that cooperatives are, today, a possible image of most organizations of the future. However, the phenomenon of cooperativism must be understood in more depth than the stock of scientifically based knowledge presents.

A survey on the Google Scholar scientific database pointed to around 5,850 studies in English on cooperativism and 16,700 in Portuguese published from 2019 to April 2023. It is a robust production; there seems to be no doubt about that. However, two things stand out a lot. The first is that the number of studies in Portuguese is almost three times greater than that published in English, the language of science. Among other factors likely to explain this primacy seems to be the fact that cooperativism is a phenomenon of greater interest to the realities of countries that speak that language than those that do not, which implies admitting the hypothesis that here cooperativism still exists. has an important role to play, unlike other foreign realities. It seems, for example, that countries considered more economically and socially developed prefer the path of partnership between organizations rather than the creation of cooperative organizations. Strategic alliances are typical examples of

organizational partnerships (Kinanti & Arini, 2023; Kaihatu & Oktavio, 2020; Igbokwe & Elikwu, 2019; Almeida et al., 2019).

The second thing is the microscopic, almost inexpressive number of studies that conceptually define the phenomenon of cooperativism. It is the conceptual definitions that delimit and present the main characteristics of a phenomenon from the point of view of science, as can be seen from the studies of Muraro and Rifon (2023), Üver et al. (2022), Hani et al. (2021) and Novikau (2021), among countless others. Definitions say what a phenomenon can be considered, given that science is probabilistic. Probability considers the main characteristics of what is being defined and outlined, which describes what is most essential in the phenomenon under the definition. For example, to define the human body, it is necessary to consider the head, the trunk, or the limbs because they are essential and, therefore, allow us to identify and understand the human body. As scientific knowledge about a particular phenomenon advances, it is natural that its scope, its boundaries are more clearly defined and delimited. Strangely, this has not happened with cooperativism. Studies are increasing, but this phenomenon has not yet drawn the scientific community's attention to the necessary delimitation of its conceptual scope. Several practical aspects of cooperativism are compromised without advancing conceptual definitions, as is the case of teaching and learning about cooperative practice.

In this sense, this study aimed to propose a scientifically based conceptual definition of the phenomenon of cooperativism based on a literature review. For this, the conceptual bibliographic method was used, which is a bibliometric method and represents the first part of the scientific-technological method developed by Nascimento-e-Silva (2020; 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). The method consists of formulating a problem and creating a response pattern to guide data collection in scientific databases, configuring the second stage. The database chosen for the collection of study data was Google Scholar. The third stage is the organization of the collected data, which is done by presenting some logical scheme that makes the sought answer visible. The fourth and final stage is the document's writing, which contains the answer found and its respective sources of evidence.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study had as a unit of analysis the conceptual definitions found in the Google Scholar database. They were handled by the definitional linguistic principles, in which every conceptual definition is composed of an equivalence term, which makes the concept to be defined equivalent to it, and attributes, which differentiate the use of that term and make it equivalent to the concept. For example, "man" can be conceptualized like this "Man can be defined as the male human being." Man is the concept under the definition, "can be defined as" is the probability expression of science, "being" is the equivalence term of the concept man, "human" is an attribute of the equivalence term "being," and "male sex" it is an attribute of the "being," which is "human" and which makes it equal to man. Translated into logical terms, we have: "man = being (human), male." This linguistic principle was applied to generate the results of this study.

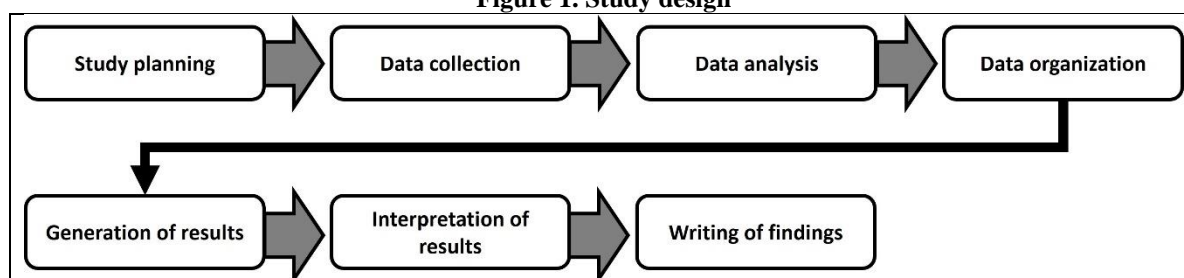
Guiding Questions

The intended general objective was divided into two guiding questions. The structure of conceptual definitions formed by an equivalence term and attributes led to the choice of these two questions. Thus, the first guiding question was, "What are the equivalence terms (main approaches) of cooperativism found in the conceptual definitions of scientific studies available in the Google Scholar database?". The second question was, "What are the main attributes of the scientifically based conceptual definitions of cooperativism found in Google Scholar?".

Study design

The guiding questions were answered in seven, as shown in Figure 1. The first was the study planning, which consisted of formulating the problem, determining the general objective, and choosing the specific objectives, which were transformed into guiding questions. The response standard was created on the problem. The problem was "What is cooperativism," and the response pattern was "Cooperativism can be defined as." The second was data collection on the Google Scholar scientific base. The third step was data analysis, which separated the equivalence terms from their respective attributes. The fourth step was the organization of the data. First, the terms of equivalence were organized to discover the different approaches to cooperativism that the terms of equivalence reveal. The attributes were organized so they could be discovered, which are the main aspects of cooperativism already unveiled by science.

Figure 1. Study design



Source: prepared by the authors.

The fifth step was the generation of results. The results were generated based on the quantitative principle of frequencies. Each equivalence term and attribute were quantified; their semantic proximities were then analyzed and used to generate semantic groups when necessary. The sixth step was interpreting the results, which was done by comparing what the empirical findings showed with what the scientific literature points out. Finally, the seventh stage followed the logic of writing scientific manuscripts, which materialized in this article.

Population and sample

The population of this study consisted of all the conceptual definitions found in the scientific literature available on the Google Scholar base in Portuguese and English until April 10, 2023. The population included articles published in journals and annals of events, dissertations, and academic theses. The definitions of didactic, technical, and philosophical books were disregarded because the intention was to take a picture of cooperativism based on scientific productions. Undergraduate and specialization monographs were also excluded from the study population because almost all of them lack the scientific rigor that dissertations, theses, and articles published in annals and journals present. After all the exclusions, the sample constituted a census since all the definitions found were handled in a total of only six definitions that met the requirements of this study.

Data collection instrument

Data were collected with the aid of a two-column table. The data's bibliographic data were noted in the first column, and in the second, the data themselves. At the end of the survey, the six definitions found and their respective bibliographic notes were available, constituting what the scientific-technological method calls data mass. Each data and its bibliographic indications were noted in a line in the table. In total, there were six lines of data.

Data collection strategy

Data were collected using the response pattern formulated during the study planning. The central problem was "What is cooperativism?" the scientific-technological method recommends that the standard answer for this type of question be "Cooperativism can be defined as." This response pattern was pasted on the Google Scholar search page, and the quotation marks delimited the phrase so that the search engine understood that those five words needed to be together in the same sequence. After the "enter" command, each link with the presented response was opened and analyzed to determine whether it complied with the study criteria, which consisted of a) being a study approved by a rigorous evaluation system and b) being a complete conceptual definition, with equivalence term and explicit attributes. If the requirements were met, the definition was copied and pasted into the table to form the mass of data. The survey ended when all links were consulted.

Data Analysis and organization techniques

After being collected, first, the data were analyzed. Analyzing means breaking it into parts. As a conceptual definition is structured regarding equivalence and attributes, these parts were separated to be organized individually. This way, a list was obtained with all equivalence terms and another with all attributes of all definitions. The organization took place on each of the lists. The list of attributes was straightforward to organize in a table format because only five equivalence terms were found in the list, and only one of them was cited twice, which was the term Doctrine, found only in the studies by Baldissarelli et al. (2018), and Vieira et al. (2022).

The organization of the attributes was more complex, involving more techniques and phases because the attributes are almost always too numerous, even for a small number of conceptual definitions. Twenty-nine attributes were found, some with repetition, such as Democracy, mentioned in the studies by Vieira et al. (2022) and Larrabure (2010), and Economy, in the studies by Vieira et al. (2022) and Fontes Filho et al. (2008). As there were few individual repetitions (frequencies), semantic groups were formed so that it could be known what those data indicated. Thus, six semantic groups characterize cooperativism: relationship, equality, challenges,

substantivity, social organization, and problem-solving. The first grouping was called “Relationship” because this is the most appropriate word to synthesize, semantically, the words “people,” “participation,” and “coexistence” and, at the same time, a signal that cooperativism favors relationships in cooperative organizations. by encouraging people to participate in decisions and to live in harmony to achieve common goals. The same logic was used to create the other semantic groups.

Techniques for Generating and interpreting results

The results were generated simultaneously with applying the semantic grouping technique, also used to organize the data, but considering the linguistic principles of conceptual definitions. The results related to the terms of equivalence indicated the main approaches found in the literature about studies on cooperativism. This means that doctrine, form, sharing, production, and association are the five approaches through which cooperativism is studied and understood. On the other hand, 29 attributes represent the most studied and known aspects of cooperativism that the studies have already addressed found.

The results were interpreted by comparing the empirical results obtained about the approaches and characteristics presented by the studies with the conceptual definition of cooperativism with the contemporary studies that place cooperativism in cooperative organizational typologies, associations, and partnerships. These results seem to support the hypothesis that the few conceptual definitions of cooperativism are because this phenomenon has its scope diluted among contemporary organizational typologies.

Study limitations

Some limitations reduce the explanatory scope of this study. The first one concern data sources, which focused on Google Scholar. By consulting other databases, the mass of data could be more significant. However, it is worth mentioning that Google Scholar's search tools can penetrate practically all databases, with the difference in whether access is allowed. In all links available in the search, it was possible to access the text sought, which reduces this limiting power.

The second concern using the fixed response pattern is “Cooperativism can be defined as.” It is worth mentioning that experiments were done with similar patterns, such as “Cooperativism can be conceptualized as” and “Cooperativism can be interpreted as,” with no results returned. No returns were obtained.

The third and last concerns the exclusive use or frequent combined use of the grouping and semantic analysis technique for the organization and generation of results. It is important to emphasize that conceptual definitions are linguistic structures equivalent to mathematical equations, so the definition “Management is the process of planning, organizing, directing and controlling resources to achieve objectives” can be said like this: $f(\text{Adm}) = P(p + o + d + c) \rightarrow \text{ob}$. Thus, forecasting, programming, and planning are different ways of referring to the same phenomenon, synthesized in planning, which, in this study, would be the name given to this semantic group.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings of the study will be presented. It is organized by the research's guiding questions so that each part corresponds to the answer obtained for a research question. First, the most common equivalence terms found, which correspond to the main scientific approaches to the cooperativism phenomenon, will be presented. Next, the discoveries related to the attributes and their organization in semantic groupings will be shown, representing the main aspects studied and known by science. Afterward, the results are compared with contemporary studies on cooperativism, highlighting the most common use of the equivalence terms. The section ends with the proposition of a conceptual definition that updates existing definitions, which no longer account for the current stage of knowledge about cooperativism.

Cooperativism: Main approaches

The literature review pointed out very few studies about what cooperativism is. The most common way of approaching cooperativism is as a doctrine, as found in the studies by Baldissarelli et al. (2018) and Vieira et al. (2022). A doctrine can be understood as a series of teachings about the most varied intricacies of a given reality to explain what that reality is and guide people's procedures and attitudes. In this sense, cooperativism is also a doctrine because it holds a series of knowledge, coming from different sources, both from science and from cooperative practice, about different aspects of the reality of this type of organization. This doctrine is philosophically grounded, such as the notion of democracy, scientifically, in managerial and financial procedures, legally, in the procedures for its constitution and dissolution, among countless others.

Another equivalence term for cooperativism found in the literature was form (Silva et al., 2018). More precisely, a form of coexistence. From this perspective, cooperativism requires a specific and distinct relationship between cooperative members and the institution's management body and with the public external to the cooperative, whether individuals or legal entities. Cooperative practice disciplines individual behavior to be

directed towards the common good, representing the convergence of individual efforts to achieve collective goals. Thus, cooperativism is seen as a way in which members' efforts are directed toward achieving common goals. Table 1 summarizes these findings.

Table 1. Cooperativism: equivalence terms

References	Equivalence terms
Baldissarelli et al. (2018); Vieira et al. (2022)	Doctrine
Silva et al. (2018)	Form
Gayatri et al. (2011)	Sharing
Larrabure (2010)	Production
Fontes Filho et al. (2008)	Association

Source: data collected by the authors.

Sharing was another form of cooperativism approach found (Gayatri et al., 2011). The idea behind the word sharing is that of donation and distribution. Those who share donate a small quantity of themselves to others. If a group of people shares, the result of sharing can be the materialization of immense wealth that, if handled with a little donation of each person's time, can become even greater. In this sense, sharing is equivalent to cooperativism because, here, the cooperative members donate a small quantity of themselves and their efforts to multiply their productive and achievement capacities so that they can later enjoy them.

Another equivalence term for cooperativism found was production (Larrabure, 2010). Production has the sense of generating cooperative principles. The cooperative principles produced are the rights, duties, and obligations that will guide the cooperative organization's direction and need to be included in the articles of incorporation and the organization's internal regulations. In other words, production is the rule that the associates must fulfill. The statutory rules produced need to be approved by the members of an assembly and must be in line with the current legislation of cooperativism.

Another way of approaching cooperativism is the association of people, as described in the study by Fontes Filho et al. (2008). In cooperativism, the word association relates to people with shared ideals. They join the cooperative, becoming a cooperative member, thus assuming all the rights, duties, and obligations contained in the statute and internal regulations of the cooperative organization. In cooperativism, members become cooperative members and assume the role of supplier, customer, and owner of the cooperative organization. Through legal personality, the cooperative member offers its products as a supplier or services to the market; as a customer, you use the cooperative's services to add value to your products or services; and the owner position assumes all the responsibilities of the cooperative organization. At the end of each fiscal year, if the cooperative closes the year with losses or profits, the results are divided among the cooperative members according to the operation of each member.

Attributes of cooperativism

Attributes are distinct aspects of a given being or phenomenon, giving it identity and distinguishing it from other beings and phenomena. This study found a series of attributes of cooperativism that, in turn, were organized into six semantic groups, as shown in Table 2. The first semantic grouping constructed was a relationship. The idea of relationship stems from cooperative efforts focusing on establishing relational standards among organization members. This is why, for example, the study by Silva et al. (2018) puts in the foreground the need to live together correctly so that individual and collective objects can be achieved. For this to happen, however, it is necessary to recognize that cooperatives are made up of people, as shown by the study by Fontes Filho et al. (2008), with all its peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. These singularities of people are both sources of multiplication of capacity for achievement and generation of conflicts, which requires managerial skills from their directors to enhance the former and control the latter as much as possible. The study by Gayatri et al. (2011) shows that relationships are intensified through the participatory schemes that cooperatives create, mainly for their decision-making process. Moreover, it is precisely at this moment that potential multiplicative capacities are evidenced, as well as conflicts, which are also natural occurrences. Thus, the idea of relationships as a fundamental characteristic of cooperative organizations considers the participation of people in constant coexistence in pursuit of achieving individual and collective goals.

The second semantic grouping constructed was equality. Equality is how people are treated in the cooperative; everyone is equal, regardless of belief, race, or sex; the cooperative member's membership is free and voluntary; his dismissal can be done at any time if it is your will. The members are not obliged to cooperate; they want to and must pay in the share capital. The share capital is divided into shares with equal values for all members. The share payment is imported to cover the initial expenses of the cooperative. The cooperative member can request termination at any time, but as a member, he assumes rights and duties; they begin to be valid from the moment he signs the registration form as a cooperative member; when he becomes a member, he pays in the capital, and when he leaves, he receives return the amount paid, in installments or not and with corrections by the

statute, internal regulations and legislation in force. The study by Larrabure (2010) exemplifies value as a way of valuing members, adding value to products and services offered to the market through the cooperative. The cooperative is created to strengthen its members, organize production, add value, and sell products and services in a competitive and organized manner. However, its decision-making processes need to be carried out democratically. The cooperative's decisions are made democratically in a general meeting. The general assembly is how the members decide the course of the cooperative; the main decisions that define the course of the cooperative are presented in the general meeting, such as the election of the supervisory board and the election of the board of directors, are guidelines that only have value, if it is approved at a general meeting, and only becomes valid, after voting and approval by the meeting, another example of the agenda and approval of the balance sheet, and of the work plan. The voting process in the assembly is very democratic; all members must participate, either by voting or being voted, all members have the right to run for office on the board, but for that, members need to be up to date with their obligations. Before holding a general meeting, it is necessary to publish a public notice with defined guidelines; the majority of votes are what decide whether the guidelines will be approved or rejected, so we can say that the approval process in a general meeting occurs democratically, the majority decision must be accepted, democracy and the word that must always be present in the cooperative organization (Vieira et al., 2022; Larrabure, 2010).

Challenges were the third semantic group built. Challenges are the obstacles that arise in everyday life that need to be overcome by cooperative members, managers, and directors. With each challenge that arises, the board seeks strategies to overcome them. In the cooperative business model, several challenges are encountered; the members' lack of knowledge and understanding of how the cooperative must work is an example of a challenge that needs to be overcome so that the cooperative reaches the objects for which it was created. Created. A cooperative is a legal entity created to meet a specific need, whether for its internal customers, the cooperative members, or external customers in the cooperative's area. Fontes Filho et al. (2008) study demonstrates that needs are infinite. When people organize themselves in the cooperative model, they seek to meet their needs; we can mention economic and financial problems, which are examples of needs people to seek to solve through the cooperative organization. The cooperative organization is a legal form that allows the cooperative members to access public economic, social, and cultural policies and try to alleviate the needs generated by economic problems. The study by Baldissarelli et al. (2018) exemplifies economic problems, such as restricted access to technology, lack of machinery, and lack of land reform policies. However, there are other problems, financial problems. Financial problems are another example that the study by Baldissarelli et al. (2018) shows. The lack of access to credit is one of the causes that influence the development of the activities of the cooperative members because there are credits available in several financial institutions. However, the list of requirements discourages and makes access impossible, as well as the absence of public policies that encourage financing of production means that people who are not cooperative do not have financial balance.

Substantivity was the fourth grouping created, aiming to emphasize the human, humanist nature (Vieira et al., 2022) as a differentiator of cooperative organizations from other types, focusing attention on economic and financial results as human or social. In them, the efforts of the cooperative members are fully valued (Fontes Filho et al., 2008), which represents an effective practice of social justice, equality, and freedom (Vieira et al., 2022), which are still configured in a dream or ideal for almost all other organizational types. In many organizations, there is a concern with the human dimension of employees and managers. However, the purpose or reason for existence continues to be a market success, a primacy translated almost exclusively into financial language. In cooperatives, the practice is different because financial performance remains essential. However, it is often considered the means through which cooperatives fulfill their role, which is the cooperative members' common good (Silva et al., 2018). The term "cooperative" already points in this direction: to operate, to work, to do, to work with and alongside the other members beside it, which is the translation of the prefix "co."

Social organization was the fifth semantic group constructed. It can be said that the cooperative is a social organization, as shown by the study by Baldissarelli et al. (2018), because it is not for profit, but it must have economic purposes. It means that cooperatives do not make profits but need economic results for the organization to be highly sustainable and, thus, distribute results to its members. Also, with annual results, distribute leftovers instead of sharing losses. The cooperative needs resources, as shown by the study by Gayatri et al. (2011). Resources can be human, financial, technological, and legal, among other types. The cooperative is a social organization through which members can collectively access various resources, such as those already mentioned. These resources can bring wealth and development to the members and the community, as shown by the study by Silva et al. (2018). One of the principles of cooperatives is to pay attention to the community, which means that they give back to the community part of what the community has offered them, whether natural or financial resources. One way to return part of these resources is through solidarity actions (Vieira et al., 2022). Examples of solidarity actions are renovating a school, cleaning the square, and donating basic food baskets. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

Table 2. Cooperativism: Attributes

References	Attributes	Semantic Groups
Silva et al. (2018).	Coexistence	Relationship
Fontes Filho et al. (2008)	People	
Gayatri et al. (2011)	Participation	
Vieira et al. (2022); Larrabure (2010)	Democracy	Equality
Larrabure (2010)	Value	Challenges
Vieira et al. (2022); Fontes Filho et al. (2008)	Economy	
Baldissarelli et al. (2018)	economic problems	
Baldissarelli et al. (2018)	Financial problems	
Fontes Filho et al. (2008)	Needs	
Fontes Filho et al. (2008)	Efforts	Substantivity
Vieira et al. (2022)	Humanism	
Vieira et al. (2022)	Social justice	
Vieira et al. (2022)	Equality	
Vieira et al. (2022)	Freedom	
Silva et al. (2018).	Common good	Social organization
Baldissarelli et al. (2018)	Social organization	
Gayatri et al. (2011)	Resources	
Vieira et al. (2022)	Solidarity	
Vieira et al. (2022); Fontes Filho et al. (2008)	Society	
Silva et al. (2018).	Community	Problems solution
Baldissarelli et al. (2018)	Problems solution	
Gayatri et al. (2011)	Decision making	
Vieira et al. (2022)	Rationality	
Fontes Filho et al. (2008)	Culture	
Gayatri et al. (2011)	Knowledge	
Gayatri et al. (2011)	Information	

Source: data collected by the authors.

The sixth and last semantic group created was problem-solving to designate the practice, in the cooperative, of cooperative members seeking a way to solve their problems there. The problems can be individual or collective, but through the cooperative, this path becomes less arduous since, in the cooperative, people come together to seek the solution to their problems (Baldissarelli et al., 2018). When several people are involved, it becomes easier to make a bold decision so that everyone benefits. The study by Gayatri et al. (2011) exemplifies that decision-making is a choice that must be made with great responsibility. For this to happen, it is essential that you seek as much information as possible and that you know in depth the problems being addressed. The lack of information can cause irreparable damage to the cooperative, and consequently, this damage will impact the cooperative members. The search for information is essential to generate knowledge. Gayatri et al. (2011) exemplify that the person who knows can better contribute to solving problems because they make decisions based on reason, data, and experiences; that is, they use rationality before acting. People are rational human beings. However, they often act without thinking. The study by Vieira et al. (2022) points out that rationality is practiced in the decision-making process of the cooperative, which has a trained technical staff since it exists to meet the common objectives of the people who came together to formalize it. It is a cooperative business. These attributes show that cooperative organizations have a problem-solving culture different from other organizational types (Fontes Filho et al., 2008). It is a culture based on dialogue, equality, solidarity in facing challenges, substantiveness, and contemplation of the social dimension on an equal level with economic-financial concerns.

Discussion of Results

The term doctrine is still present in several studies, such as those by Paula et al. (2019), Breitenbach and Brandão (2021), Listwa (2019), and Pönkä (2019). Although the term remains, the content has undergone many changes, moving from a mandatory body of standard practices, which was the past meaning of indoctrination, to a form of worldview practiced by certain people in which cooperation is the basis. Doctrine becomes this understanding that cooperation can subsidize and structure relationships between people so that it can become a business for all of them, simultaneously being the producers and those who earn the results of their successes and the displeasures of their failures.

Contemporary studies on cooperativism use the term form as a way of organizing the business of a cooperative organization, unlike what happens with purely economic organizations (Redondo-Sama, 2020; Brandão & Breitenbach, 2019). Individuals are organized and organize themselves to improve their living conditions by creating a form or mechanism of social and economic production. However, what is behind these different forms is precisely the cooperative system the members build, making cooperation the differentiating mechanism.

Sharing is also another term of equivalence that appears a lot in contemporary studies of cooperativism, as can be seen in the studies by Beuren et al. (2020), Beuren et al. (2019), Vitalis (2019) and Forgiarini et al. (2023). The understanding of this term is in the sense of sharing, dividing, and distributing what one has to other people, intending to collaborate with them in solving an individual or collective problem, or taking advantage of some opportunity. Again, note the underlying idea of cooperation, of which sharing is a typical example.

The term production does not seem to be as strong a term equivalent to cooperativism as the idea of association. However, a considerable number of high-quality studies linked to the idea of production and cooperativism can already be found, as is the case of Yari and Eslambolchi (2023), Pishbahar and Ferdowsi (2023), and Martos-Pedrero et al. (2023). The exciting thing about studies dealing with cooperative productions is that they often focus only on the technical nature of production, seeking to highlight process efficiency or relevance of production results, leaving aside the other side of cooperativism: cooperation. If modern cooperativism, as everything seems to indicate, puts in the foreground both the economic and financial aspect, in which production appears as empirical evidence, and the social aspect, in which the form of organization of production is also typical, if these two dimensions were treated simultaneously would offer theoretical and empirical support much more robust than the dissociative form as it has appeared, even in contemporary times.

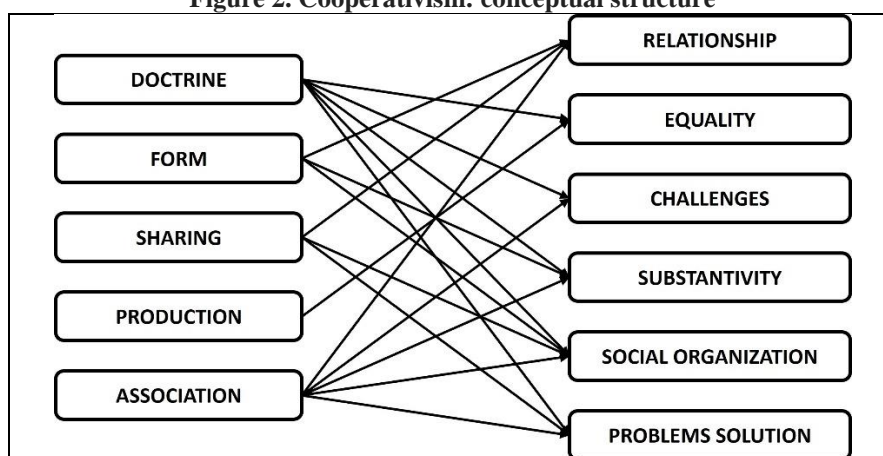
Finally, the term association is a general approach in studies on cooperativism, as can be seen in the studies of Kant et al. (2023), Avsec (2023), and Beishenaly and Dufays (2023). The association continues to represent the idea of meeting, a grouping of people whose objective is the constitution of an enterprise as a sum of efforts to reach common objectives. The undertaking combines challenges that are both economic-financial and associative. The economic-financial ones have a purely entrepreneurial focus, competing with companies that compete for the same market niches. In contrast, the associative ones account for a series of exclusive characteristics of cooperatives, where cooperation is the instrument used in practically all the actions of the cooperatives. Its members.

Conceptual definition proposal

As seen in the structural representation presented in Figure 2, cooperativism can be taken as a production system. This means that this system exists to produce something, as is the purpose of every organization. It is also a specific and unique way of organizing people and their resources to achieve common goals, in which the sharing, both of resources and of the individual difficulties of the members, makes the difference of this type of system to all the others. In others, the means of production always belong to actors other than those who carry out the production. This is the first part of the proposed definition: cooperativism is a production system.

The second part of the proposed definition comes from the attributes. What characterizes cooperativism as a production system is a need to transform resources into products and services under competitive conditions like other competing organizations. This system, therefore, seeks profit with all the technical skills that any other organization can have and use. However, economic-financial performance is not the only thing to be pursued. The living conditions of its members, associates, and cooperative members must be continuously improved as a priority focus of the cooperative, such as economic and financial.

Figure 2. Cooperativism: conceptual structure



Source: data collected by the authors.

Living conditions also and mainly imply production because the cooperative members carry it out. Therefore, new patterns of production relationships must be designed and practiced based on egalitarian decision-making systems, participation in production, and the economic and financial results the organization earns. As production belongs to the cooperative but is carried out by the cooperative member, the problems and challenges

of each member's production unit need to be worked out with the organization's specialized technicians so that the members are benefited and, by extension, the entire cooperative. There is a need, then, to structure cooperatives with a focus on business management, an economic-financial focus, and another focus on system governance, which focuses on this type of organization's humanistic, substantive character.

Thus, this study's proposed definition is that cooperativism can be defined as a production system in which its members face and overcome their challenges and solve their problems, having cooperation as the main instrument. As a production system, it needs to produce something that meets the needs of its customers and users. However, this supply needs to guarantee economic-financial success to reward the efforts and shared resources of the cooperative members, who are the owners or partners of the enterprise. Moreover, the sharing is both resources and efforts made available, and the other members' right to be met their individual needs materialized in the managerial and functional body of the cooperative company.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study showed that cooperativism could be defined as a production system in which its members face and overcome challenges and solve problems, with cooperation as the main instrument. This definition is based on contemporary studies on cooperativism, whose operation is based on two focuses: economic-financial performance, which materially enriches the cooperative members, and humanist, which enriches them with quality of life. The most successful cooperatives that one can find reports of success in the scientific literature have these focus well-defined and adequately operationalized. In contrast, failed cooperatives seem to focus on just one of these foci or turn members into political activists.

Two bibliometric studies are recommended. The first is to redo the survey in other databases, such as Scopus and Web of Science, to compare results. The impression one has is that studies in Portuguese, which are the majority in the Google Scholar base, are concentrated on the humanistic nature of cooperativism and leave aside the economic-financial aspect because they do not understand that the efforts of the cooperative members need to generate the means of paying their bills and improving the quality of their lives. The second study aims to verticalize the findings of this study. For example, it is necessary to map studies that consider cooperativism as a doctrine, form, sharing, production, and association to point out their differences and similarities and compare what these approaches have in common with contemporary studies, especially those published in the last five years. Years.

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