

## Cooperativism, public policies and social organizations: Conflicts in cooperatives promoted by the State in Argentina

## Cooperativismo, políticas públicas y organizaciones sociales: Conflictividad en cooperativas promovidas por el Estado en Argentina

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### Background

Since the end of the 20th century, the debate on alternative forms of production has been mainly carried out around the notions of "social economy", "solidarity economy" and "popular economy", among others. During the first decade of the 21st century in Argentina, cooperatives had an unusual boost, mainly due to the development of public policies that promoted the social and solidarity economy. The Argentine Works Program, which ran from 2009 to 2018, generated more than 5,000 worker cooperatives made up of vulnerable populations. In its implementation, it gave centrality to municipal governments and social organizations. The theoretical developments that nurture this article come from contributions of neo-marxism on modes of production and social conflict. In particular, its suggestion about the various types of contradictions and potential confrontations that different modes of production and their combinations in hybrid forms can trigger. In previous works, we analyzed the limitations and potentialities regarding social empowerment of these cooperatives "incubated" by the State, focusing on their socio-productive characteristics. In this research, the notion of "work conflict" is used in order to distance itself from the concept of "labor conflict", used to designate oppositions and confrontations between capital and labor. "Work conflicts" refer to struggles around the conditions of access to work, as well as its consumption and remuneration; a perspective that exceeds the employment relationship.

### Aims

What are the characteristics of the work conflicts that emerge in these socio-productive forms whose central actors are the State, cooperatives and social organizations? To what extent do their results have effects regarding the enhancement of the cooperative experiences incubated by the State? This article tackles the conflict in these cooperatives to approach its productivity as a (re)creator of relationships and social change. Specifically, it analyzes the work conflicts that these cooperatives give rise to, paying special attention to the links of such conflicts with their socio-productive characteristics.

### Method & Procedures

The research design is qualitative and is based on a case study of a cooperative of the Argentina Works Program dedicated to cleaning service, located in a popular neighborhood in the southern area of Greater Buenos Aires, which takes part in a social organization of unemployed workers. Different techniques of data collection were triangulated: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, a brief questionnaire on sociodemographic attributes and labor trajectories, and the systematization and analysis of primary and secondary sources.

### Results & discussion

The article describes two conflicts; firstly, around the definition of the productive activity, and secondly, about the production purpose. In the analysis of the work conflict due to the autonomy in the definition of the productive activity, that is, due to the conditions in which the work is consumed, it is observed that the groups that come into conflict are the workers of the cooperative and the State. While at times negotiations and institutional actions by the cooperative are

possible, in other instances the struggle for autonomy at work leads to open conflicts and direct actions. It should be noted that as a result of the conflict co-management devices are established in the modalities of organizing and controlling the attendance at work. Regarding the second conflict analyzed, the reasons underlying the disassociation of two members of the cooperative are linked to the compensations, that is, to the conditions in which the work is remunerated. These cooperative members perceive that the purpose of the cooperative aimed at providing resources for their subsistence is violated and stressed by organizational logics and purposes that they do not share. In other words, this conflict involves a struggle between different productive purposes and work conceptions that contrapose the logic centered in the cleaning service and the one that includes activism. In effect, once moved the axis from the State as the object of the demands, we observe disputes between the cooperative members and that even the other social organizations in the territory can become adversaries in the struggle for territorial-political accumulation.

### Conclusion

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the state promotion of cooperativism and social economy was framed in a broad regional process in which different governments, pre-existing experiences of civil society and international organizations converged. This article seeks to contribute to a line of research that evaluates the multiple ways of promoting cooperativism and social economy from the State in order to build fairer and more egalitarian societies in Latin America, without ignoring the contentious dimensions of social change. The analysis of the patterns of work conflicts in the studied case allows envisaging inquiries about the development of cooperativism incubated by the State and framed in the political-territorial action of social organizations. This research shows that the State can be a powerful way of generating associativism in the territories. With the limitations pointed out, the program generated co-management spaces. Of course, civil society actors were essential in consolidating such spaces; the struggles of social organizations cannot be ignored. This article illustrates that while the formation of cooperatives was promoted by public policy, the actions of the social organizations allowed the appropriation and deepening of the cooperative principles. Indeed, the research allows us to argue that fertile ways of increasing social power can be found in the synergy between the State and social organizations.

**Keywords:** Argentina, cooperative, public policies, self-management, social conflict, social economy, territory networking

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