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Cómo citar este artículo: MEIRA, D. et al. (2022): "Portuguese social solidarity cooperatives between recovery and resilience in the context of covid-19: preliminary results of the COOPVID Project", *CIRIEC-España, Revista de Economía Pública, Social y Cooperativa*, 104, 233-266.
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ABSTRACT: Covid-19 posed several challenges to all organisations in general and to social solidarity cooperatives in particular. However, the challenges faced by these cooperatives have unique features arising from their special characteristics compared to other types of cooperatives. Therefore it is vital to study these challenges and the impacts of covid-19. This study has as main goal to understand those challenges and their impact. An exploratory study was undertaken by applying 11 interviews to 11 social solidarity cooperatives. The cooperatives were chosen to be heterogeneous among the existent cooperatives in Portugal. This study corresponds to the first phase of a project that is still underway. This article presents the main results of the content analysis of the data collected from the interviews. Data show cooperatives could promptly adapt and continue their mission under pressure from the pandemic despite the first difficulties encountered in a new and unknown situation, showing a capacity to adapt and serve their members. However, these members were also submitted to several increasing and new challenges. The adaptations were possible due to legal changes in the work organisa-

tion law, from layoff to telework, government support involving financial programs, VAT, and other tax relaxation, as well as due to human resources reorganisation and the cooperatives' staff positive attitude towards the difficulties (both leaders and general workers). Differences between the social solidarity cooperatives under study concerning digital technologies showed that those already having some infrastructure had minor adapting difficulties.

KEYWORDS: Social Solidarity Cooperatives, covid-19, Challenges, Impacts, Responses, Digital Transformation.

ECONLIT DESCRIPTORS: K30, L20, O33, P13.

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RESUMEN: La covid-19 planteó varios retos a todas las organizaciones en general y, especialmente, a las cooperativas de solidaridad social. Sin embargo, los desafíos que enfrentan estas cooperativas tienen características únicas que provienen de las características especiales en comparación con el otro tipo de cooperativas. Por lo tanto, es vital estudiar estos desafíos y los impactos de covid-19. Este estudio tiene como objetivo principal entender esos retos e impactos. Se realizó un estudio exploratorio realizando 11 entrevistas a 11 cooperativas de solidaridad social. Las cooperativas fueron elegidas por ser heterogéneas entre las cooperativas existentes en Portugal. Este estudio corresponde a la primera fase de un proyecto que aún está en marcha. Este artículo presenta los principales resultados del análisis de contenido de los datos recogidos con las entrevistas. Los datos muestran que las cooperativas pudieron adaptarse rápidamente y continuar con su misión bajo la presión de la pandemia, a pesar de las primeras dificultades presentadas en una situación nueva y desconocida, mostrando una capacidad de adaptación y de servicio a sus socios. Sin embargo, estos socios también se vieron sometidos a varios retos nuevos y crecientes. Las adaptaciones fueron posibles gracias a los cambios legales en la ley de organización del trabajo, desde el despido hasta el teletrabajo, al apoyo gubernamental que implica programas financieros, al IVA y a la flexibilización de otros impuestos, así como a la reorganización de los recursos humanos y a la actitud positiva del personal de las cooperativas ante las dificultades (tanto de los dirigentes como de los trabajadores en general). Las diferencias entre las cooperativas de solidaridad social estudiadas en relación con las tecnologías digitales mostraron que las que ya contaban con alguna infraestructura tuvieron pequeñas dificultades para adaptarse.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cooperativas de Solidaridad Social, covid-19, Desafíos, Impactos; Respuestas, Transformación Digital.

Resumen amplio

Las cooperativas de solidaridad social portuguesas entre la recuperación y la resiliencia en el contexto de covid-19: resultados preliminares del Proyecto COOPVID

La crisis de la covid-19 ha planteado varios retos a todas las organizaciones en general y a las cooperativas de solidaridad social (CSS) portuguesas en particular. Sin embargo, los retos de las CSS son distintos a los de otras cooperativas debido a sus características específicas. Las CSS persiguen, principal o exclusivamente, una finalidad mutualista desinteresada o altruista denominada por el legislador “fines de solidaridad social”. La CSS cumple una clara misión de asistencia a situaciones de vulnerabilidad social y económica, basándose en un paradigma de intervención social, plasmando valores de altruismo y solidaridad, contribuyendo a la aplicación de los derechos sociales, lo que queda claramente recogido en el concepto legal. Por lo tanto, es vital estudiar los desafíos e impactos de la covid-19 en la CSS y entender cómo han reaccionado y se han adaptado a este entorno tan perturbador. Con este objetivo, el proyecto COOPVID surgió como un estudio interdisciplinario sobre el impacto de la covid-19 en las CSS portuguesa. Otros estudios que se han llevado a cabo con objetivos similares se limitan, sin embargo, a diferentes periodos pandémicos, por lo que presentan conclusiones distintas, ya que la evolución de la pandemia es diferente en cada ocasión. Además, no pueden considerarse que los estudios sean definitivos, ya que la covid-19 sigue avanzando. Nuestro estudio está más actualizado, ya que las entrevistas se realizaron un año después del inicio de la pandemia, por lo que esperamos tener un resultado más maduro, debido a un marco temporal más amplio para el análisis.

El objetivo principal de este trabajo es entender cómo las cooperativas han respondido a los desafíos planteados por la pandemia en términos de servicios prestados, gestión de recursos humanos, gestión de los recursos financieros y transformación digital.

Para ello se realizaron once entrevistas a once CSS entre el 22 de marzo y el 23 de abril de 2021. Se utilizó un método de muestra de conveniencia. Se seleccionaron las CSS para que fueran lo más diversificadas y representativas posible. Todas las entrevistas se programaron previamente con cada entrevistado y se realizaron en línea a través de la plataforma ZOOM. Las entrevistas se grabaron y se transcribieron posteriormente. Además, se realizó un análisis de contenido temático de los datos recogidos. En este documento se presentan los resultados obtenidos a partir de estas entrevistas exploratorias y se discuten dichos resultados.

El análisis de las entrevistas muestra que, bajo la presión de la pandemia, las cooperativas han podido adaptarse rápidamente y continuar con su misión a pesar de las primeras dificultades encontradas en una situación nueva y desconocida. Las adaptaciones han sido posibles gracias a los cambios legales en la ley de organización del trabajo: el gobierno portugués creó un apoyo financiero excepcional y temporal destinado a mantener los puestos de trabajo, denominado despido simplificado, un régimen de teletrabajo obligatorio independientemente de la relación laboral, programas de apoyo financiero, como en el IVA, y otras flexibilizaciones fiscales, y modificó la ley para que las asambleas generales de las cooperativas que debían producirse por imposición legal o estatutaria pudieran celebrarse hasta el 30 de junio de 2020, y por medios telemáticos.

El análisis de las entrevistas muestra la crisis pandémica de la covid-19 como un periodo de aprendizaje, superación y ajuste de las metodologías de intervención en los servicios prestados por las cooperativas. Se encontraron enseñanzas y estrategias en los discursos de los entrevistados. Se percibió la falta de preparación para el nuevo fenómeno, la inseguridad y la necesidad de adaptarse a las nuevas demandas. En cuanto a las estrategias, las cooperativas han podido hacer frente a los retos mediante la comunicación a distancia por teléfono, correo electrónico y videollamada. La intervención ha consistido principalmente en el seguimiento y apoyo psicosocial, el apoyo a las actividades escolares y la identificación de las necesidades alimentarias y sanitarias, con la consiguiente mediación y articulación con los servicios pertinentes. Sin embargo, la falta de recursos tecnológicos o el analfabetismo digital de los beneficiarios han sido obstáculos para este nuevo modelo de comunicación.

Las cooperativas han tomado medidas drásticas de gestión de recursos humanos para ajustarse a la situación extrema que surgió de la pandemia de la covid-19. Según los entrevistados, la necesidad de reorganizar el trabajo ha sido un problema urgente, en particular en lo que respecta a: 1. la organización de los equipos, 2. la contratación, 3. las estrategias específicas (despido y teletrabajo) y 4. la multifuncionalidad. Además, ha sido necesario formar al personal en materia de salud y seguridad y, a medida que evolucionaba la digitalización, en temas de información y nuevas tecnologías. Por último, la actitud de los empleados ha sido crucial para superar las dificultades. Su capacidad de adaptación en esta situación extrema ha sido muy alta; la cultura de participación en la vida de la organización, poniendo sus habilidades a disposición de la cooperativa, ha sido una actitud clave en este contexto.

En cuanto a la gestión de los recursos financieros, las cooperativas han tenido que adaptarse a las nuevas necesidades introducidas por la pandemia, exigiendo un esfuerzo financiero adicional o incluso un cambio en los planes de inversión. Además, se ha producido un aumento de los gastos relacionados con los equipos de protección personal y el material de desinfección en general, la contratación de personal debido a la creación de equipos de refuerzo, y el aumento de la demanda de servicios sociales prestados por la organización.

Las cooperativas se han visto obligadas a cambiar sus procesos organizativos habituales y a apoyar a sus socios. Como resultado, han incorporado rápidamente las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC) en varias áreas. La pandemia ha acelerado la adopción de la tecnología digital. Como resultado, observamos la incorporación de las TIC en varias áreas de

las cooperativas. Del análisis de las entrevistas surgieron cuatro dimensiones clave: 1. Digitalización de los procesos: las CSS se vieron obligadas a comprar TIC para apoyar sus actividades principales y garantizar el cumplimiento de su misión; 2. Uso de las TIC: que por parte de las CSS se encuentra en diferentes fases; las CSS que trabajan con ancianos y personas con limitaciones cognitivas están por detrás de los que trabajan con niños y jóvenes, lo que se debe a una mayor alfabetización tecnológica del público objetivo; 3. Teletrabajo: las cooperativas, al igual que otras organizaciones, han tenido que cumplir con esta imposición legal, y la compra de tecnologías y la formación del personal han sido los principales retos. El uso de las tecnologías en el teletrabajo ha alterado los horarios de trabajo. Las tareas ya no están condicionadas al “horario de trabajo”, lo que repercute en la vida familiar y social; 4. Relación institucional: debido a las dificultades tecnológicas, las asambleas generales de las cooperativas se pospusieron o se celebraron a través de videoconferencia, utilizando Zoom o Teams. La situación de la pandemia ha demostrado que las reuniones de trabajo podían celebrarse sin necesidad de desplazarse. Como resultado, ha aumentado la asistencia a las reuniones con los cooperativistas o a las reuniones generales celebradas por videoconferencia.

La pandemia de la covid-19 ha desencadenado cambios rápidos y una gran capacidad de adaptaciones para hacer frente a las restricciones necesarias, debido a las preocupaciones por la salud pública, la importancia del trabajo físico y la necesidad de que los empleados cumplan la misión de sus cooperativas (educación especial; apoyo a niños, ancianos y necesidades especiales; pobreza y reintegración). La naturaleza del trabajo y las limitaciones de los clientes (físicas, económicas, educativas) han sido a menudo impedimentos para el trabajo a distancia.

Los resultados del análisis de las once entrevistas ponen de manifiesto la concentración en el cumplimiento de la misión de la Cooperativa: no estaba en cuestión, había que hacerlo. Las nuevas directivas legales y sanitarias permanentes del Gobierno han obligado a los dirigentes a reorganizar la estrategia de la Cooperativa. La actitud, la disponibilidad y la multifuncionalidad del personal han permitido llevar a cabo esta reorganización.

El proyecto COOPVID sigue en marcha. De los próximos trabajos surgirán nuevos conocimientos: una encuesta aplicada a las CSS y diferentes grupos de discusión que se llevarán a cabo para debatir las necesidades, estrategias y recomendaciones del sector.

1. Introduction

In early 2020, we were all surprised by the spread of a new and dangerous virus (SARS-Cov2), highly contagious and with lethal effects. This was a public health emergency of international scope, declared by the World Health Organization on January 30, 2020, which classified the spread of the virus as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. The covid-19 pandemic generated by the SARS-Cov2 virus probably represents one of the most significant challenges of recent decades posed to organisations, including those of the Social Economy (Strzelecki et al., 2020).

Over the course of 2020, as a direct consequence of this pandemic and related to it, more than 200 legal diplomas were published in Portugal, including decrees of the President, ordinance (laws of the parliament), decree-laws of the government, dispatches, and resolutions. The countless legislative outputs covered almost all sectors of life in society, from freedom of meeting to freedom of movement, from agriculture to services, from public administration to private companies and Social Solidarity Institutions (IPSS)¹, from the elderly to children and those engaged in voluntary work. Due to their impact on the life of cooperatives, the legislative interventions in the following areas should be highlighted (Alexandrino, 2020; Fábrica, 2020; Gomes, 2020; Mamede *et al.*, 2020; J.Z. Martins, 2020; Santos, 2020):

- Mandatory confinement of patients with covid-19 and infected with SARS-Cov2 and citizens on active surveillance.
- Duty of prophylactic isolation for all persons in risk groups (over 70 years old, immuno-compromised and those with chronic illnesses, for whom there is a special duty of protection).
- Restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons, inside and outside the national territory: they may only do so to carry out essential tasks and functions (health, purchase of basic goods or services, work, assistance to family members, freedom of the press, going out for a short period for physical activity or animal-walking).
- Suspension of teaching and non-teaching and training activities with the presence of students.
- Suspension of retail trade activities, except for those providing necessities or other goods considered essential.
- Alteration to the opening hours of establishments.
- Adopting the telework regime is mandatory whenever the functions in question allow it.
- Prohibition of religious celebrations and other religious events that implies people's gathering.
- Public services are provided essentially through digital means, maintaining face-to-face service only by appointment and for those services considered essential.

1. From the Portuguese: "*Instituição Privada de Solidariedade Social*".

Understanding how Social Solidarity Cooperatives have reacted and adapted to this highly disruptive environment is essential. With this purpose, the COOPVID Project emerged as an interdisciplinary study on the impact of covid-19 on Portuguese social solidarity cooperatives. This project has as main goals: i) the analysis of the legislative contribution to attenuate the adverse effects and solve the challenges identified in the context of the pandemic; ii) the identification of the digital transition strategies that took place at the level of work organisation to face the challenges of social distancing and teleworking; iii) the understanding of how the social solidarity cooperatives are positioned for the post-covid challenges; and iv) the identification of recommendations for intervention at the internal and external level, to meet current and future needs.

The COOPVID project has three phases. The activities of the first phase comprise the development of a literature review of the legislation that was put in place to overcome the difficulties created by the pandemic and the implementation of eleven exploratory interviews with Cooperatives' leaders. The second phase consists of a questionnaire survey applied to social solidarity cooperatives, and this phase is underway at the time of writing this article. Finally, different focus groups will be run in the third phase to discuss the sector's needs, strategies, and recommendations.

This article presents the results obtained from the exploratory interviews in the project's first phase and discusses those results. The paper's main objective is to understand how cooperatives have responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic concerning i) services provided; ii) human resources management; iii) financial resources management; and iv) digital transformation.

The next section of the paper presents the theoretical background, namely the legislative outline and the digital issues of the social solidarity cooperatives and changes due the pandemic. We also refer to some related studies, emphasising the results of the first published study on the pandemic impact developed by Martins & Pinto (2021). Next, the methodological approach is presented, followed by the results and discussion. Finally, the last section concludes the paper and provides future research directions.

2. Theoretical Background

Covid19 pandemic has led to the shutdown of several economic activities, increasing unemployment (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020), intensifying social inequalities and poverty (Sumner et al., 2020; United Nations, 2021), with a strong impact on efforts to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Mukarram, 2020; United Nations, 2021). Social solidarity cooperatives, as other social economy organisations, have the potential to support economic and social recovery by providing innovative solutions (OCDE, 2020) demonstrating both resilience and social commitment (Billiet et al., 2021; Bucaciuc et al., 2020) and can have a more important role in the post-covid era by enhancing the shift towards a more inclusive and sustainable economy and society (OCDE, 2020). According to Billiet et al. (2021)

the resilience of cooperatives stems from the very essence of these organisations - meeting the needs of their members, so they will continue to produce and provide the services in periods of crisis. It also results from the strong engagement with the community movement that “promotes a culture of governance that leads them to act entrepreneurially to uphold their values and support their community” (Billiet et al., 2021, p. 100). Social economy organisations can mobilise resources (financial and non-financial) from different sources due to their simultaneous economic and social role, but many have worsened their financial situation (OCDE, 2020). Cooperatives have adapted their activity to the specific needs of their members which led, in some situations, to changes in economic production, reallocation of financial resources and changes in investment plans (Billiet et al., 2021).

2.1. A brief approach to the legal regime of social solidarity cooperatives

The legal regime of social solidarity cooperatives is set out in Decree-Law (DL) No. 7/98, of January 15 1998 (“Decreto-Lei N° 7/98 de 15 de Junho,” 1998). In the preamble of this DL, the legislator states that creating the branch of social solidarity cooperatives “has created one more instrument that civil society can use to fight poverty and social exclusion”. It also says “solidarity is thus exercised in many areas that find a privileged response in the generosity, voluntarism, and intervention of the cooperative sector.” This DL states that social solidarity cooperatives are governed “by the regime set out in this decree-law and, in its omissions, by those of the Cooperative Code”. Therefore, in areas not covered by the regulations set out in DL No. 7/98, the more general rules of the Cooperative Code (“Lei n.º 119/2015 de 31 de Agosto,” 2015) shall directly apply, with a reference to the social solidarity cooperative branch in the article 4(1)(l).

Article 2 of DL No. 7/98 provides the notion of social solidarity cooperatives: “1 -Social solidarity cooperatives are those that, through the cooperation and mutual assistance of their members, in obedience to the cooperative principles, aim, on a non-profit basis, to satisfy the respective social needs and their promotion and integration, namely in the following areas: a) Support to vulnerable groups, in particular children and youth, people with disabilities and the elderly; b) Support to socially disadvantaged families and communities with a view to improving their quality of life and socio-economic insertion; c) Support to Portuguese citizens living abroad, during their stay outside national territory and after their return, in a situation of economic deprivation; d) Development of support programmes directed towards target groups, namely in situations of illness, old age, disability and severe economic need; e) Promotion of access to education, training and professional integration of socially underprivileged groups. 2 - In addition to those listed in the previous number, social solidarity cooperatives may develop other actions that have an identical object to those foreseen in the previous number and, within the limits of the Cooperative Code, provide services to third parties.”

From the legal notion, it results that cooperatives pursue, mainly or exclusively, a disinterested or altruistic mutual purpose, named by the legislator as “social solidarity purposes”, fulfilling a clear mission of assisting to situations of social and economic vulnerability, based on a paradigm of social intervention, giving expression to the values of altruism and solidarity, contributing to the implementation of social rights, which is clearly conveyed in the legal concept (Meira, 2020a).

There are 174 Social Solidarity Cooperatives in Portugal, mainly in social services and education, to support people with disabilities, children and the elderly (CASES - Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social, 2020).

2.2. Layoff

One of the most important measures taken by the Portuguese government in the context of the pandemic was the creation of exceptional and temporary financial support aimed at maintaining jobs, dubbed as simplified layoff. This measure was created by Ordinance No. 71-A/2020 of March 15, 2020 (“Portaria n.º 71-A/2020 de 15 de Março,” 2020), and later by DL No. 10-G/2020 of March 26, 2020 (“Decreto-Lei n.º 10-G/2020 de 26 de Março”, 2020), which repealed the ordinance. To access this support, the company would have to consider itself in a situation of business crisis, which, to this end, would occur in one of the following situations: (a) total or partial closure of the company or establishment, arising from the duty to close facilities; (b) total or partial inactivity as a result of the interruption of global supply chains; (c) total or partial inactivity, as a result of the suspension or cancellation of orders or reservations; (d) abrupt and sharp drop of at least 40% of the billing² (Dray, 2020).

This support allowed the employers to maintain jobs by reducing regular working hours or suspending employment contracts. In turn, workers would be entitled to a retributive compensation corresponding to 2/3 of the remuneration – or, if higher, the value of a national minimum wage (NMS) in force (in 2020, € 635.00; in 2021, € 665.00), having as a ceiling three times that amount – 70% payable by the Social Security, and the remaining 30% by the employer. In addition, the undertakings receiving the support would also be entitled to (a) a special financial incentive to support the resumption of the company’s activity, paid at once and in the amount of a national minimum wage per worker; and (b) the total exemption from payment of social security contributions for the workers concerned and the members of the statutory bodies of the company during the months of application of the measure.

2. Which, however, would not prevent the employer from resorting to the so-called traditional lay-off, already provided for in the Labour Code (Art. 298 and ss), in particular, in the case of companies whose situation cannot be classified as a “business crisis”, as defined by DL No 10-G/2020. In broad strokes, the traditional lay-off differs from the simplified lay-off essentially because the former obliges the employer to comply with a more rigid and time-consuming procedure, besides that it does not include either the allocation of the extraordinary financial incentive to support the resumption of the company’s activity or the exemption of social security contributions. To access this support, companies undertook to fulfil several obligations, including the inability to terminate employment contracts under collective redundancy, dismissal for termination of the job or dismissal for non-adjustment, during the period of granting this incentive and in the subsequent 60 days; and the duty to keep the contributory and tax situations regularised.

The support entered into force on March 27, 2020 and lasted from one month to a maximum of three months, although it was extended until August 2020. However, following the need for new confinement in Portugal, which occurred in early 2021, this simplified layoff regime was subject to a legislative amendment. This amendment was introduced by DL No. 6-C/2021, under which the payment of 100% of the remuneration of the workers covered was ensured. In addition, the range of situations allowing its use has been narrowed, and it is now established that this support will only be eligible in the event of suspension of activities and closure of facilities and establishments by legislative or administrative determination of governmental source. This support lasted up to one month and may be extended monthly while the closure duty was maintained. The study from Martins and Pinto (2021) on the impact of covid-19 in IPSS shows that 40,7% of the sample used layoff. Of these, 8,5% had to use layoff to the totality of workers.

2.3. Telework

Before the beginning of the pandemic, the provision of the activity by the worker on a teleworking regime was always subject to the agreement of the parties, and reduced to writing since it was considered a special employment contract (art. 165 et ss. of the Labour Code) (Gomes, 2020).

Article 6 of Decree No. 2-A/2020 of March 20, 2020 (“Decreto n.º 2-A/2020 de 20 de Março,” 2020) marked the beginning of the express obligation to take up the telework regime, regardless of the employment relationship, provided it was compatible with the functions performed and the employer has the means to do so. This requirement has been maintained appreciably since the beginning of the pandemic up until recently, when telework shifted to being merely recommended during the state of calamity (although remaining mandatory in the period between January 2th and January 9th of 2022). Given that the adoption of the teleworking regime in this particular context stems from a legal imposition, it is no longer necessary to formalise it in writing^{3 4}. Most social economy organisations (54,1%) studied by Martins & Pinto (F. Martins & Pinto, 2021) were using remote work at some point of the pandemic. Some organisations of the sample (5,5%) have worked entirely from home.

3. However, following the process of release that occurred after the first vacancy in Portugal, this mandatory regime was amended by DL No. 22/2020 of 16 May, which provided that the provision of work on a teleworking regime can be determined unilaterally by the employer or requested by the worker, without the need for agreement of the parties, provided that compatible with the functions performed.

4. According to paragraph d) of paragraph 1 of Order No. 3614-D/2020, the validity of which was extended by Order No. 5419-A/2020 of May 11. Thus, the obligation of teleworking would be imposed again in Portugal under Decree No. 3-A/2021 of January 14, at the time of the country's second general confinement.

2.4. Virtual general meetings

Article 18 of DL No. 10-A/2020 provided that general meetings of cooperatives that should occur by legal or statutory imposition could be held until June 30, 2020. The law allows general meetings of cooperatives to be held by telematics means, “unless otherwise provided for in the statutes.” Thus, this will be a possible “path” to be adopted in this period in which the intention is to avoid, as much as possible, face-to-face meetings. It should be noted that holding general meetings by electronic means implies that the cooperative “ensures the authenticity of the declarations and the security of the communications, registering their content and the respective participants.” Moreover, article 5(1) of Law 1-A/2020 favours telematics means to hold general meetings, establishing that “the participation by telematics means, such as video or teleconference of members of collegiate bodies of public or private entities in the respective meetings, does not prevent the regular functioning of the body, particularly concerning quorum and resolutions, although the form of participation must be recorded in the respective minutes.” Note that this practice was already allowed in the pre-covid period. In fact, since 2006, the use of telematic means for the meetings of the General Assembly of cooperatives has been allowed (Domingues, 2006). However, the pandemic has made this option almost inevitable for most cooperatives.

The use of telematics in general meetings may be an important means of facilitating and encouraging cooperators' participation in the meetings, thus contributing to the consolidation of the democratic and participative functioning that characterises these entities (Fajardo-Garcia, 2020). Participation in general meetings is a right/duty of cooperative members. All cooperators and investor members in full enjoyment of their rights have the right to participate in general meetings (Article 33(2) of the Cooperative Code) (Snaith et al., 2017). In the context of virtual participation, the cooperative shall ensure that all cooperative members have the means and training to participate in virtual general meetings. If this is not the case, the cooperative shall provide for the necessary education and training to enable virtual participation.

In the case of cooperatives, digital education and training of cooperators are based on the principle of education, training and information described in Article 3 of the Cooperative Code, as formulated by ICA in 1995, namely: “Cooperatives shall promote the education and training of their members, elected representatives, leaders and workers so that they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They should inform the general public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of cooperation”.

One of the internal projections of this principle is the recognition of the right of cooperative members to participate in cooperative education and training activities (Article 21(1)(f) of Cooperative Code). In exchange for recognising this right, cooperatives are obliged to organise such education and training activities. To that end, they shall set aside a reserve fund for “the cultural and technical education and training of cooperative members, cooperative workers and the community” (Article 97(1) of the Cooperative Code). The organisation of these education and training activities is typical of federations and confederations of cooperatives. Article 108(1)(d) of the Cooperative Code states that federations and confederations are responsible

for “fostering and promoting cooperative training and education and may manage the education and training reserves of members” (Meira, 2020b).

2.5. Digital Transformation, Digitalisation, and Digitisation

Aspects related to the digital transition in organisations are becoming increasingly relevant. Digital Transformation (DT) is a commonly used buzzword in this framework. DT can be associated with the introduction of Information Systems and Technologies (IST) in organisations. Thus, usually, DT appears connected with both terms Digitalisation and Digitisation. These terms are often used indistinctly in the literature (Kutzner et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, these terms refer to three distinct concepts. It is fundamental to distinguish between them since they represent different phenomena. DT is the purposeful and continuous digital (r)evolution of an organisation at the strategic and tactical levels, centred on its willingness and desire to reinvent itself based on a deep leveraging of digital in a disruptive manner. Digitalisation is the process of implementing a particular technology in an organisation to digitally support some process or processes, occasionally changing its business model. On the other hand, digitisation is how a physical document is transformed into a digital document, adapting it to the opportunities offered by technologies (Curado Malta et al., 2020).

It was already emphasised in 2018, in the Digital Transformation Scoreboard 2018 EU business, that the future of organisations would be digital (Probst et al., 2018). Also, the EU Publication New technologies and digitisation - Opportunities and challenges for the social economy and social economy enterprises (Comissão Europeia, 2020) focus on how these organisations face the challenges DT poses. Some recent research indicates that the covid-19 pandemic was an accelerator of DT in organisations (Soto-Acosta, 2020).

The study from Martins & Pinto (2021) shows that social economy organisations struggled with digital illiteracy from their beneficiaries. But only 2,3% of them pointed to the need for support for the digitalisation of the organisations.

3. Related work

Table 1 presents related projects about the impacts of covid-19 in Social Organisations. One of the major limitations of these studies is that they relate to different pandemic periods, thus presenting different conclusions as the pandemic evolution is different on each occasion. Moreover, they cannot be considered terminal studies as covid-19 is still progressing. Our study is most updated since the interviews were conducted one year after the beginning of the pandemic, so we expect to have more mature results due to a more extensive time frame for analysis.

Table 1. Main related projects

Goal of the project	Promoter	Methodology
Impact of covid-19 on Social Organisations in Portugal	Data Science Knowledge Center e-Leadership for Impact Knowledge Center - Nova SBE	Questionnaire survey N=232 First edition: 20/03 - 03/04 (2020) ⁵ Second edition: 24/06 a 20/07 (2020) ⁶
Exploratory study on the impact of the pandemic covid-19 on IPSS and its beneficiaries in Portugal	Catholic University, Porto	Questionnaire survey with qualitative dimensions N=329 06-07 (2020) ⁷
Social Economy in the covid-19 context	Polytechnic of Setúbal and Polytechnic of Portalegre	Questionnaire survey N=557 First edition: 27/05 - 08/07 (2020) ⁸ Second edition: 9/02 - 25/03 (2021) ⁹
Combating Poverty in the Context of covid-19. Results of the Organisations Survey	Observatório Nacional de Luta Contra a Pobreza EAPN Portugal	Questionnaire survey N=802 22/04-02/05 (2020) ¹⁰
Covid-19 crisis and its economic and social impact on Cooperatives across Europe.	Cooperatives Europe	Questionnaire Survey 14/05 - 1/07 (2020) ¹¹
Covid-19 impact	Tango International. Venture 37	Questionnaire Survey May, June, and July 2020 ¹²

We emphasise the study “Exploratory study on the impact of the pandemic covid-19 on IPSS and its beneficiaries in Portugal” (Martins and Pinto, 2021). This study is based on 329 participants surveyed using quantitative and qualitative questions. It focuses mainly on the impact of the services provided during the 1st wave of the pandemic (data gathered between June and July of 2020). It already provides some results, namely:

5. https://www2.novasbe.unl.pt/Portals/0/Files/DSKC_SIOsImpactCovid19_Results.pdf?ver=2020-05-04-173552-063

6. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nWlp3_SmJmz6DVNT03C65RoSkSGy6k9x/view

7. https://www.porto.ucp.pt/sites/default/files/files/CRP/docs/2021-03_ATESUCP_RelatorioCOVID-19nasIPSS.pdf

8. https://www.ips.pt/ips_si/noticias_geral.ver_noticia?P_NR=7824

9. <http://diretorio.sector3.pt/Publications/Details/9632-inquerito-as-oes---economia-social-no-co>

10. <https://www.eapn.pt/documento/687/o-combate-a-pobreza-em-contexto-da-covid-19-resultados-do-inquerito-as-organizacaoes>

11. <https://coopseurope.coop/resources/news/survey-report-covid-19-impact-cooperatives>

12. https://ocdc.coop/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/covid-19-impact-study-final-report_9-4_final.pdf

- decrease in the number of volunteers, donations, and revenues
- at HR level:
 - adoption of teleworking measures
 - use of layoffs / temporary closure of social responses
 - use of shifts and overnight stays
 - mobilisation and commitment of employees
- concerning opportunities observed:
 - acceleration of the DT process
 - inter-cooperation with similar organisations, municipalities, and local health entities
 - flexibility and speed of adaptation
- at the level of concerns for beneficiaries:
 - mental health
 - economic difficulties
 - overload of informal caregivers
- concerning the main needs identified:
 - reinforcement of networking and communication with public entities
 - economic-financial support (focus on personal protection equipment)
 - increase in the number of qualified operational workers.

4. Methodological approach

The study presented in this article uses a qualitative methodological approach. Interviews were used as instrument for data collection. Eleven interviews were conducted between March 22, 2021, and April 23, 2021. All the interviews were previously scheduled with each interviewee and took place online via the ZOOM platform. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. A thematic content analysis of the data collected was undertaken. The details are presented in the following sections.

4.1. The instrument for data collection

A script was created for the interviews (see Appendix 1). The script starts with including the presentation of the COOPVID project to the interviewees. After that, the interviewees were invited to present themselves and their institutions for characterisation. The next part of the script had questions that were organised in such a way as to contain the dimensions of analysis initially defined: i) services provided; ii) governance and transparency; iii) human resources; iv) financial resources; v) connection with stakeholders and the community; vi) innovation; and vii) digital transformation. The script ends with a final balance.

4.2. Sample characterisation

A convenience sample method was used. The social solidarity cooperatives were selected to be as diversified and representative as possible of all the activities developed by this cooperative branch. The characterisation of the cooperatives chosen for the sample is presented in table 2. The names of the cooperatives are not given for anonymisation. The interviewees were leaders of the cooperatives; they are characterised in table 3, and their names are not given for anonymisation.

Table 2. Characterisation of the cooperatives

Cooperative	Age (years)	Nr. of Workers	Nr. of Users	Intervention Area	Residential care	Location
Coop01	45	111	2400	Vocational training/ occupational activities / home support / residential home / early intervention / inclusion	yes	North
Coop02	45	100	1100	Residential home / occupational activities / vocational training / autonomous residence / early intervention / resources for inclusion	yes	South
Coop03	22	240	650	Multi sectorial / Integrated continued care units / social support, health and rehabilitation for people of any age and with any need, disability or dependency	yes	South
Coop04	20	52	n/a	Childhood/Social Income/ Social Support	yes	South
Coop05	45	114	n/a	Children with disabilities / Residential homes / Kindergarten + day care / inclusion / Vocational training / occupational activities	yes	South
Coop06	44	100	n/a	Education / Rehabilitation / training / inclusion	yes	Centre
Coop07	46	43	260	Kindergarten/Pre-school/ 1st cycle/ Free time activities centre	no	Centre
Coop08	5	n/a	30	Occupational activity / young people/adults with intellectual disabilities (with severe limitations in terms of activity and participation) and multi-disabilities, over 16 years old.	no	North
Coop09	7	18	n/a	Education/employability	no	South
Coop10	9	n/a	350	Education (3 to 10 years) / interconnection with technical and vocational education	no	South
Coop11	10	13	30	Education and rehabilitation / occupational activities for disabled people	yes	North

Table 3. Characterisation of the interviewees

Cooperative	Function	Male / Female
Coop01	General Manager	F
Coop02	General Manager	M
Coop03	Chairman of the board of directors/ general manager	M
Coop04	General Manager	F
Coop05	General Manager	F
Coop06	Chairman of the board of directors	M
Coop07	Technical director	F
Coop08	Director of services / Technical director	F
Coop09	Chairman of the board of directors	M
Coop10	Pedagogical director	F
Coop11	Technical director	F

4.3. Strategy for the analysis of data

A content analysis of the data collected with the interviews was conducted based on the interview script's dimensions. During the analysis, it was verified that dimensions of governance and transparency, connection with stakeholders and the community, and innovation were transversal to the others. Results show four dimensions i) services provided; ii) human resources management; iii) financial resources management, and iv) digital transformation. For each dimension, several categories were identified (table 4), presented and described in the next section.

Table 4. Categories identified for each dimension during the analysis of the data

Dimension	Themes
Services provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of preparation process • Adaptation to new demands • Feeling of insecurity • Strategies
Human resources management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work reorganisation issues • Staff training • Employees' attitude
Financial resources management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenditure level changes • Income generation changes
Digital transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digitalisation of processes • Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) • Teleworking • Institutions' communication

5. Results

In this section, the results obtained from the data analysis are presented, considering the identified dimensions and the respective categories found during the content analysis.

5.1. Services Provided by the Cooperatives

The preliminary analysis of the eleven interviews conducted broadly portrays the pandemic crisis of covid-19 as a period of learning, overcoming barriers, and adjusting the intervention methodologies in the services provided by the cooperatives. We found apprehensions and strategies in the interviewees speech, the two main categories. Regarding the apprehensions, we classified them into three sub-categories for analysis: i) the feeling of a lack of preparation process; ii) the need to adapt to new demands; iii) the feeling of insecurity.

Apprehensions

The first category of analysis, about the feeling of a lack of preparation process we got answers such as “we were not prepared for this. We were prepared, and we are encouraged to open social responses, to lengthen programmes so that we have a timetable to fulfil and provide more responses to the needs; we were never prepared to say ‘now they are going to close’” [COOP4]. So, cooperatives had to reinvent the articulation, work closely with beneficiaries

and react promptly to the pandemic's progression and its various cycles. Another interviewee mentioned that "nobody was expecting it and then there was a week when we had to change everything in the institution: the form of communication, of interaction with parents" [COOP7].

About the sub-category regarding the need to adapt to new demands, most cooperatives say that the Residential homes were particularly challenging. Given the suspension of the remaining social responses, the cooperatives under study used videoconference tools with their users confined to their homes. This service maintained on-site activities during the National State of Emergency period, adapting to the new demands for planning and building contingency and socialisation plans for safety rules and personal distance. Home food support was also activated or reinforced, with a more significant number of requests due to the decrease in household income and which they believe is directly related to the covid-19 pandemic crisis. Even so, one interviewee [COOP2] emphasises the importance of previous pandemic contexts, such as Influenzavirus A, and the emergency plans built in that period as good organisational practices to deal with covid-19 pandemic.

The last sub-category in the apprehension category concerns the feeling of insecurity and fear of getting back to normality. Mostly in periods when face-to-face activities are resumed, interviewees felt apprehensive about beneficiaries coming back to regular face-to-face activities because of their non-immunisation and the need to accomplish the cooperatives' work of providing safety and health education.

Strategies

Cooperatives were able to deal with challenges by using remote means of communication such as telephone, e-mail, and video call. The intervention consisted mainly in monitoring and psychosocial support, support for school activities and identification of food and health needs, with consequent mediation and articulation with the relevant services. However, the lack of technological resources or the beneficiaries' digital illiteracy were obstacles to this new communication model. This constraint stressed the difficulty of communicating regularly and using video call with users "our contact is limited to a phone call, a short call to see if everything is OK or not, if something is needed or not and only with 5 or 6 are we able to make video calls and some intervention in any other way" [COOP8]. As a result of this finding, one interviewee stated the need to empower these target groups, while, on the other hand, opportunities may arise for other services in the family context "we will have to create services that enable us to support people who are at home, even if a new service has to be developed. There are challenges, and there is potential here for new services because there are needs that we noticed during this period that were not fulfilled. We noticed that the elderly do not all use a mobile phone and do not know what's an email. They could not talk to their family doctors, and we have to find strategies here" [COOP1].

5.2. Human Resources Management

Organisations took drastic human resources management (HRM) measures to adjust to the extreme situation that emerged due to the covid-19 pandemic. According to the interviewees, we can highlight three main categories of analysis: work reorganisation issues, staff training and employees' attitudes.

Work reorganisation issues

The main category that emerged in the HRM field is work reorganisation, which refers to how the work is done. This category includes sub-categories such as (i) team organisation, (ii) hiring, (iii) specific strategies (layoff and telework), and (iv) multifunctionality.

Teams were mainly organised in a mirror-like manner to deal with the public health restrictions. Each team worked for two weeks while the other was at home and then changed. In some situations, there were fixed teams with fixed clients. Furthermore, a second team would step in if needed in the other few cases. In some cases, the mirror-like team organisation demands additional employees. In other cases, a government financing program mainly financed the double. All cooperatives hired people. During this crisis, legislation allowed for the use of two specific already existent legal strategies, with lighter demands than before to manage people: layoff and remote work. To deal with some services closure organisations used layoff temporarily which means the employer paid only a part of the salary and the employees received additional payment from the Government. One of the cooperatives indicated a different attitude in the second lockdown: "it was financially adequate to put some people in layoff, and so we did it" [COOP4]. Telework was used for employees' health protection while keeping the organisation running. There was just a small part of employees in most cooperatives whose work could be done remotely. Some of them were the training monitors: "besides getting their work up to date, they had the opportunity to come up with new ideas, which is not easy in the day-to-day normal work" [COOP5].

Most employees made an easy transition to the home office. They used the specific skills of training monitors in carpentry and locksmiths to complete minor maintenance arrangements and create the necessary conditions [COOP1]. As some cooperatives lacked enough technological equipment, they offered to use their own equipment to do the work [COOP4]. Only one Cooperative found telework not productive. Multifunctionality, employees' willingness to do tasks that are different from their usual activities, enabled the cooperatives to work effectively and was mentioned as a vital issue by most interviewees. There was a lot of multifunctionality "among people whose services closed, helping to meet needs in other services, such as secretaries helping in the kitchen and meals distribution" [COOP3]. Moreover, there was "no problem, no complaint to the Labour Authority; no one refused to do any task required" [COOP6].

Staff training

Staff training is also an essential issue in the HRM field in current pandemic times. All the cooperatives had health and security training. Some used the underwork period to update staff training, and “even had more training than before, online training, that is” [COOP5]. Most cooperatives decreased training hours in 2020 and are trying to increase to an average pace in 2021. In one of the cooperatives, they hired a nurse to train people to deal with health and security risks. They highlighted that all employees participated gladly, not just the most qualified as before. Furthermore, it was easy for them to work with infected clients [COOP1].

As digitalisation evolved, there was training in information and technology topics, like Microsoft Teams. However, there was some resistance among the older workers (from 45 to 60 years old) because the training plan was online [COOP7].

Employees' attitude

The employees' attitude towards work emerged as a crucial category to effective operation of cooperatives within the HRM field. All the interviewees are mainly the technical directors of the cooperatives, and they highlighted the staff's adaptability in this extreme situation. Some also referred to the “availability and involvement of staff” [COOP2, COOP6] and “dedicated” to the cooperative mission [COOP9]. The culture of participation in the organisation life, making their skills available to the Cooperative was a key attitude in this context [COOP1, COOP2, COOP8].

5.3. Financial resources management

To improve the utility of their members, the cooperatives had to adapt to the new needs generated by the pandemic. An additional financial effort or even a change in investment plans (Billiet et al., 2021) was required. When analysing the main financial difficulties experienced by these cooperatives during the pandemic, it is critical to understand the main challenges the cooperatives face in terms of expenditure and income generation capacity.

Expenditure changes

Almost all organisations reported an increase in the expenditure incurred during the pandemic. The main issue mentioned by the respondents was an increase in expenditure due to purchasing of personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfection material in general. The investment in PPE was essential for the safety of employees and users. It ensured the continuity of the work developed by the cooperative, even at times when pandemic indicators were at the highest levels, especially in the initial phase of the pandemic, where possible contagions in the workplace were still quite unknown. Several organisations mentioned the exceptionally high spending on the purchase of masks due to high sale prices in the early stage of the pandemic.

There was a severe shortage of masks, which compromised a significant amount of financial resources in its purchase. There was also an increase in hygiene and cleaning expenses due to more extensive and frequent cleaning.

Concerning personnel expenditures, we found that most organisations had an increased need to hire personnel due to the creation of mirror teams and increased demand for social services provided by the organisation. However, the additional hiring needs did not significantly impact the expenditure due to the government's support programs, particularly the MARESS program promoted by the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training.

Although not very common, some organisations reduced personnel expenses because of their prophylactic isolation, as Social Security covered their remuneration during that period. Furthermore, there was also a reduction in personnel expenses in a small number of cases due to the layoff option. During the first confinement, the organisations sought to avoid using this instrument; however, in the second moment of lockdown, the institution's financial situation forced them to resort to layoff.

There was also an increase in computer equipment investments to make it possible to use remote work and the digitalisation of some processes and activities. The investments were mainly made in purchasing computers, cameras, tablets and internet access pens. However, some organisations have reported that their employees used their personal computers to carry out remote work, significantly saving the institution's financial resources.

Several organisations reported that they had to re-design their physical spaces to ensure the creation of isolation spaces, conditions for social distance, and improvement of users and employees' physical and emotional well-being. However, only a few of them mentioned the financial impact of this investment.

One of the institutions highlighted the increase in the costs of purchasing food, which had significant weight on the Organisation [COOP03]. The cooperatives also observed increased transport expenses, motivated by the maximum occupancy limits allowed.

In some cases, there was a reduction in the expenditure, justified by the closure of part of its activities. The reduction in expenditure was mainly observed in electricity, water, other consumables, and food. These financial resources savings were channelled to investment in acquiring technological equipment. One of the institutions also reported a significant reduction in spending on travel and accommodation [COOP09].

Income generation changes

Concerning changes in the income generated by different sources, we observe a total or partial reduction through the monthly fees of users in activities suspended during the pandemic period. However, this reduction did not significantly impact the organisations because Social Security maintained the full payment related to each user contribution during the confinement period, although some of the organisation services were not open. There is also a reduction in other sources of income, such as holding events, fundraising campaigns, merchandising sales and other activities. In addition, one of the institutions expressed its concern about a possi-

ble change in the donors' behaviour in the future due to potential changes in their priorities [COOP11].

For the financial year 2020, most of these institutions faced a deterioration in the results obtained. Several organisations indicated negative results, which are explained by the changes in the expenses and income levels mentioned above. Some institutions have expressed some concern about their ability to generate surpluses in the coming years.

During the pandemic, organisations used the support provided through some existing programs, such as those promoted by Social Security, social economy entities (especially highlighted the Portuguese Cooperative Confederation –CONFECOOP), Patrons, Town Halls, Parish Councils, and other stakeholders. Some of this support was pecuniary, and others consisted of in-kind donations to the institutions. The organisations also reported that in-kind donations were especially relevant to obtain PPEs; otherwise, the impact on the organisation's spending level would be substantially worse.

Regarding the support granted by Social Security, the organisations generally highlighted the importance of the "Social Adapt +" program. It was a non-reimbursable grant created to strengthen social response during the pandemic period, to finance up to €10,000 the costs incurred by social economy organisations with the acquisition of personal protective and hygiene equipment, as well as the costs incurred in training workers and reorganising work areas and social equipment. However, two organisations highlighted some dissatisfaction with the too bureaucratic procedures required to apply to this program and the lengthy decision-making period.

To obtain the goods (such as gloves, caps, boot covers, protective clothing, masks and face visors, thermometers, disinfectant gel and its dispensers) deemed necessary to address the effects of the covid-19 outbreak, several organisations also highlighted the importance of the temporary Value Added Tax (VAT) exemption created by Law No 13/2020, May 7. It was applicable to acquiring those assets by the State, other public bodies, or charitable or philanthropic non-profit organisations that have concluded a cooperation agreement to develop their social responses or were licensed for that purpose.

It should also be noted that some organisations have the possibility of extending compliance with tax obligations (either by extending the deadline for the delivery of tax returns or by extending the period for payment of taxes) and extending the payment of bank interest, recognising its importance in treasury management, although being aware of the drawbacks it may have in the future. One of the organisations mentioned not being dependent on the payment of taxes because it considers that this is a revenue intended to finance Social Security [COOP11].

Regarding future investments, the pandemic has not brought significant changes to the decisions already taken, although some delays have been observed.

5.4. Digital technology adoption and transition

The Cooperatives were forced to change their normal operation both in organisational processes, and support to their members. As a result, they rapidly incorporated ICT in several

areas of the Cooperatives. The pandemic speeded up digital technology adoption. From the analysis of the interviews made to the cooperatives, four key dimensions emerged: i) digitisation of processes, ii) use of ICT, iii) teleworking, and iv) institutional relationship.

Digitalisation of processes

Cooperatives were forced to buy ICTs to support their core activities and ensure the fulfilment of their mission. In addition, the incorporation of these technologies has forced professionals to carry out ICT training.

Once the first impact was overcome and distance monitoring stabilised, it was possible to proceed with the digitisation of documents, which has qualitatively improved the performance of the work.

Use of Information and Communication Technologies

The use of ICT by the cooperatives is at different stages. Cooperatives working with the elderly and with people with cognitive limitations are behind those working with children and young people – this is due to the better technological literacy of the target audience; according to COOP8, a Cooperative working with the elderly, 90% of families are unable to use new communication technologies.

Although not everybody is using the mobile phone yet, it was the most used means of contact. COOP8 and COOP 11 said they keep in touch with the families by phone every day”, but COOP1 said, “We realized that not all elderly people use a mobile phone and do not know what’s an email”.

Cooperatives working with children and young people used Zoom, Teams, YouTube and Google [COOP7, COOP10] to accomplish their mission. There was also the implementation of technological solutions to support distance learning - e-learning [COOP9]. On the return to face-to-face teaching, due to the legal impossibility of parents entering classrooms, videos were produced on the children’s activities to be shared later with parents [COOP7].

Teleworking

By legal imposition, telework was implemented when possible. The cooperatives, like other organisations, had to comply with this imposition, the purchase of technology and staff training were the major challenges [COOP1, COOP5, COOP9].

The technical and staff teams developed many activities through Zoom, Teams, and e-mail, among other tools [COOP8].

The use of technologies in teleworking disrupted working hours. Requests are no longer conditioned to “working hours” with an impact on family and social life.

Institutions' communication

Due to technological difficulties, some cooperatives' general meetings were either postponed or held through video conferencing, using Zoom or Teams.

The pandemic situation showed people understand that work meetings could be help with-out the need to travel. In fact, people realised that time and money spent on travelling could be saved, especially for international meetings. Zoom and Teams were the most used tools to participate in meetings.

The participation increased in meetings involving cooperative members or general meetings held by videoconference [COOP5, COOP6]. Some cooperatives are already considering holding meetings in a mixed format (i.e., in-person and by video conference) in the future to increase participation.

6. Discussion

This exploratory study on the pandemic coping strategies of social solidarity cooperatives in Portugal covers four perspectives: services provided, human resources management, financial management, and digital technology adoption and transition.

The covid-19 pandemic triggered rapid changes and adaptability to cope with the necessary restrictions, due to public health concerns, the importance of physical work and, the need for the employees to achieve their cooperatives' mission (special education; child, elder and special needs support; poverty and reintegration). The nature of the work and the clients' limitations (physical, economic, educational) were often impediments to remote work.

The results of the eleven interviews highlight the focus on accomplishing the Cooperative's mission: it was not at stake – it had to be done. The government's permanent new health and legal directives forced the leaders to reorganise the Cooperative's strategy. The staff attitude, availability, and multifunctionality have enabled this reorganisation to be implemented. This result corroborates the data from Martins and Pinto (2021, p. 8) study, in which workers are considered essential in the front line of the pandemic with an "extraordinary dedication".

In general, cooperatives of our study have implemented a teleworking regime for most of their employees, except in those cases where the functions were not compatible with a remote work model (e.g., monitoring and assisting the elderly). Apart from these cases, the experience of teleworking was positive, and the cooperatives expressed their intention to continue to adopt this work model even in a post-pandemic scenario. The main difficulty identified was the treasury fall to make the technological equipment available for the workers' activity. There was the obligation to provide the worker with the tools to work on a teleworking regime and ensure the installation, maintenance, and payment of the costs involved.

The empirical analysis allowed us to infer that more than half of the Cooperatives surveyed ended up not using the layoff mechanism, pointing out as the main motivation for their non-support the fact that they seek to avoid burdening the organisation's workers with a re-

duction in their remuneration. However, one of the cooperatives revealed that it had joined this mechanism as early as 2021, precisely because the worker would be granted 100% of his monthly remuneration. On the other hand, a significant percentage of cooperatives resorted to functional flexibilisation mechanisms to avoid shutdown (and, consequently, the need to use the layoff figure). Data analysis showed that more than half of the Cooperatives surveyed ended up not using the layoff mechanism, mainly because they did not want to reduce their workers' salaries. However, one of the cooperatives revealed that it had joined this mechanism later in 2021 because the workers would be granted their total monthly payment, while in 2020, they were only paid 60% of their salary. In fact, a significant percentage of cooperatives resorted to functional flexibilisation mechanisms to avoid closing (and, consequently, did not need to use the layoff figure) by placing staff, whose services were reduced due to shut down, temporarily, in other departments where they needed extra help. These results are also highlighted by Martins and Pinto (2021), showing that social economy organisations revealed the capacity of reaction and adaptability, which applies to the internal dimension of management and the mobilisation of resources to give flexible and creative solutions to their beneficiaries.

The study of Martins and Pinto (2021) identifies three related main challenges: i) financial difficulties - increasing costs and decreasing income; ii) lack of human resources and/or specific worker's skills; iii) maintenance of intervention capacity with beneficiaries. Our investigation corroborates these results but adds some more, namely in the digitalisation field.

The cooperatives adopted digital technologies to face the pandemic, but not all at the same level. As far as we understand, this adoption is primarily due to the level of digital literacy of the target group of intervention. The situation forced workers to use digital tools as never before to work in collaboration at home. In addition, it built digital literacy of all cooperatives' workers sent home; as far as we understand, this situation forced workers to learn and develop a potential of awareness on how things can be done differently - a disruptive circumstance enabled innovation. In the future, this new knowledge and vision can be used and explored to introduce DT processes in the social solidarity sector of the social economy in Portugal. It is clear that cooperatives are not all at the same level regarding the potential for DT. As far as we understand, this is due to the level of digital literacy of the workers of the cooperative but also due to the level of digital literacy of the target group of intervention. A more specific study of the whole social economy sector in Portugal is currently underway to understand the state of the art of the installed technological capacity, the digital literacy of its workers, and the existing digitally-based practices. We will be able to better understand the state of the art of the social-economic sector in terms of DT to develop plans for future action in terms of DT. These plans should make the best use of this potential created due to the disruptive moment that was experienced during the covid-19 pandemic.

7. Conclusion

This article presents the results of eleven interviews conducted with leaders of Social Cooperatives in Portugal to understand how these organisations were affected by the covid-19 pandemic and study how they responded to it to continue accomplishing their mission.

The cooperatives were selected from all the social and solidarity cooperatives in Portugal to be as diverse and representative as possible. The interviews were conducted by teleconference and followed a script based on the following dimensions of analysis: i) services provided; ii) governance and transparency; iii) human resources; iv) financial resources; v) connection with stakeholders and the community; vi) innovation; and vii) digital transformation. We carried out a thematic analysis of the content of the data collected from the interviews. During the analysis, we observed that the dimensions of “governance and transparency”, “connection with stakeholders and the community”, and “innovation” were transversal to the others. So, it was decided to present the results based on the four dimensions i) services provided; ii) human resources management; iii) financial resources management, and iv) digital transformation.

The results of the eleven interviews show that during the covid-19 pandemic, the cooperatives' human resources were focused on continuing to fulfil the Cooperative's mission and showed high adaptability to changes. Fulfilling the mission was not an easy job. Human resources had to improvise because there was no time to prepare new processes, as there was a significant disruption in the institutions' working processes. On the other hand, they found strategies to deal with the situation by using tools to communicate at a distance, such as telephone and video conferencing. Teleworking, when possible, was mandatory, and institutions had to implement new ways of accomplishing their mission at a distance. Both at the level of teamwork and institutional communication, where work meetings and general meetings were held by video conferencing, participation in general meetings was greater than when they were held in person. Many institutions are already considering changing the model of how meetings are held for the period post-pandemic. Almost all organisations said there was an increase in the expenditure during the pandemic due to the need to buy personal protective equipment, disinfection material in general and technological equipment for the workers to work from home. Also, most institutions had an increased need to hire personnel due to the creation of mirror teams and increased demand for social services provided by the organisation. This did not affect the Portuguese government's support programs due to the expenses. The interviews also showed a total or partial reduction of the monthly fees of users in activities suspended during the pandemic period. However, this reduction did not significantly impact the organisations because Social Security maintained the full payment related to each user contribution during the confinement period. And there were changes in the work organisation law, namely, layoff and telework, and government support involving financial programs, VAT, and other tax relaxation.

The Cooperatives were forced to change their normal organisational processes and support to their members. As a result, they rapidly incorporated ICT in several areas of the Cooperatives. The pandemic speeded up digital technology adoption. Also, in this dimension of ICT

use, they were able to adapt, and without specific training, they could use the tools in the best way to fulfil the institution's mission. As we understand, this situation forced workers to learn and develop a potential of awareness on how things can be done differently - a disruptive circumstance enabled innovation. In the future, this new knowledge and vision can be used and explored to introduce DT processes in the social solidarity sector of the social economy in Portugal.

This study presents the limitation of having used a low number of interviews conducted, limiting the extension of the results to the population of the Social Solidarity Cooperatives in Portugal. Nevertheless, this is a preliminary study to provide initial insights into the second phase of the COOPVID, which is undergoing at the time of writing this article.

Acknowledgements: This article is a tribute to Rogério Cação, who recently passed away. Rogério Cação played a remarkable role in the cooperative movement in Portugal, with a life path of dedication to social causes.

Autors' Contribution: Deolinda Meira: Writing - Legal framework, Major revisions, script definition; Ana Azevedo: Writing - Digitalization and digital transformation, Edition, Major revisions, Methodological approach, Script definition; Conceição Castro: Writing - Financial resources, Methodological approach, script definition; Brízida Tomé: script definition, Interviews' management, implementation and transcriptions, Ana Cláudia Rodrigues: Writing - Human Resources, Major revisions, Script definition, Methodological approach; Susana Bernardino: Writing - Financial resources; Ana Luisa Martinho: Writing - Human resources, Writing - Services Provided, script definition, Interviews' management; Mariana Curado Malta: Writing - Digitalization and digital transformation, Major revisions, Methodological approach, Script definition; Agostinho Sousa Pinto: Writing - Digitalization and digital transformation; Bruno Coutinho: Writing - Human resources; Paulo Vasconcelos: Writing - Legal framework; Tiago Pimenta Fernandes: Writing - Legal framework; Ana Maria Bandeira: Writing - Financial resources; Ana Paula Rocha: Writing - Legal framework; Marlene Silva: Writing - Human Resources; Mafalda Gomes: Writing - Human resources; Writing - Services Provided.

Funding: This work is financed under the project POISE-03-4639-FSE-000291.

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Appendix 1 – Script of the interview

- **Background to the interviewee**
Brief presentation of the COOPVID Project; Context/scope of the interview; Importance of the participation of the interviewee; Request for authorisation to record the interview.
- **Characterisation of the institution** (Location, Age, Dimension, Intervention areas).
- **Characterisation of the interviewee** (Main functions, Time in the position; Academic background; Professional career).
- **SERVICES PROVIDED**
Supply and Demand: Main changes on Social Needs/ on Target publics/Strategic measures (e.g., Investment plans)
- **GOVERNANCE and TRANSPARENCY**
Constitution of the governing bodies and responsibilities; governance practices before and during the pandemic; Main changes to the organisation's functioning due to Covid-19; Instruments used to ensure transparent management of the organisation and concerning the support provided by its funders? Main changes in terms of accountability/transparency. Participatory processes: During the pandemic, did decision-making occur in a more centralised or participatory way?
- **FINANCIAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**
Main challenges and difficulties experienced in managing financial resources and comparison with the situation before the pandemic; Changes in structural costs; Sources of income: there were changes in income used by the organisation? Special funding sources and eventual lack and difficulties in its access; Ability to mobilise financial and non-financial donations; Measures adopted to overcome these difficulties.
Access to any financial support programmes from the State?
Legislative Intervention: Access to tax benefits and/or more manageable payment of taxes?
- **HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**
Main changes that the pandemic brought about in managing people/human resources: availability, attendance, working hours, teleworking, layoff, commitment and collaboration with colleagues, versatility and mobility, reconciling professional, personal and family life, volunteers.
Need for additional hiring? Need for Layoff? Need for teleworking? Changes in the organisation of work teams and schedules.
- **CONNECTION WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITY**
Some change in the organisation's main stakeholders due to Covid-19; Interaction with stakeholders, community and public authorities used in solving the challenges encountered; Main changes in connection with the organisation's beneficiaries in times of pandemic; And with the broader community, what has changed? What are the main constraints experienced?

The increased need for resources requires greater cooperation between sectors at different levels. How has this inter-cooperation been strengthened during the pandemic of COVID-19, or how should it be strengthened in the future?

- **INNOVATION**

Do you think the organisation became more or less innovative during the pandemic? If yes, what innovative solutions were developed during the pandemic?

- **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

What are the main technological/digital processes that have changed with the pandemic?

Thinking about the initiatives needed for change:

Organisational obstacles encountered in implementing these changes; Some organisational changes had to be implemented because of the introduction of technology in working practices? Were employees trained for the technological changes imposed? Before the COVID-19 crisis, which was the use of social media for communication/promotion? Have they started to have/use them? If you already had them, were there any changes in the management of these media and the regularity of updates with the pandemic? Any changes in the way in which you relate to users? (e.g., video calls); If new products/services were created to balance the losses caused by the pandemic crisis, what technological and organisational implications occurred to implement this change? How are management bodies and employees committed to implementing the mentioned technological changes?

- **Balance**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, what was the most challenging phase for developing the organisation's activity?

What are the main fears experienced?

And for the future? What are the main expectations and fears?

What are the main changes that the pandemic will leave in the organisation's functioning and its strategy?

What are the main lessons/learnings that the organisation can take away for the future with the pandemic?

How can these institutions play a transformative role in the recovery period of Covid-19, contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive development?

In the post-crisis period and when taking public measures to stimulate the economy and promote a transformative vision of society, what are the main values that you think should be promoted?