

## Expanded abstract

### Work in cooperatives and collective action. Political subjectivity as an analytical tool

Work cooperatives are self-managed forms of production that, throughout history, have played a palliative role in the face of crises and failures of the capitalist system, through the generation of work and support networks. As well, they have been conceived from the beginning as effective or potential spaces for social transformation. This article focuses on this second transforming or disruptive role, by studying the processes of political subjectivation that take place in the framework of collective work.

The objective was to identify the elements that limit or expand the possibilities of social change from work in cooperatives. The theoretical framework referring to social transformation draws on contributions from solidarity economy theorists, as well as community and popular Latin American feminisms. For its part, for the analysis of the individual dimension, the concept of identity is taken, distinguishing identity as integration, as a resource and as a commitment. Finally, the processes of political subjectivation associated with collective work are characterized from the conceptual triad subalternity-antagonism-autonomy.

The methodological design included an in-depth study of four Uruguayan cooperatives and contains in the same comparative approach recovered companies from the industrial area (widely studied in the region) and professional services cooperatives (on the rise both in the national and international context), which adds variability to their reasons for emergence and to aspects considered fundamental by the literature for the development and potential of cooperatives. Uruguay is characterized by being a country with a wide presence of cooperatives of different types and contains useful contextual elements for analysis, such as the existence of public policies to promote cooperatives, mainly since 2010.

For this reason, two cases with emergence prior to 2010 and two after that year were taken, to have experiences with different duration and created in different contexts in terms of the existence of state promotion. The main technique was the in-depth interview, complemented by participant observation and the analysis of secondary sources.

The analysis of the individual level involved the construction of a typology that considers the meaning given to work in cooperatives by its members. People with strong motivation and commitment were called “militants”, those with few job alternatives outside the cooperative “by necessity” workers, and those for whom the cooperative is just another place of work were called “indifferent”. It was found that age, economic needs, and the level of social awareness (determined by the biographical and educational trajectory of the subjects) are characteristics that affect the configuration of each group. However, it was found that workers change their profile over time (based on collective work and for external reasons) and that characteristics of one type and another are sometimes combined in hybrid profiles.

Regarding the characterization of the groups of workers, based on the analysis, a distinction is made between subordinate cooperatives and antagonistic cooperatives. In both types of cooperatives, the three dimensions of political subjectivity (subalternity, antagonism and autonomy) are present, but with different degrees and associated with different elements. In the subordinate cooperatives, economic conditions and dependence on the environment prevail, which is synthesized in the recurring idea, among the people interviewed, of “resistance” in a framework of hegemonic domination. These are cooperatives where the reproduction of individualistic behavior is more usual, with a lack of “cooperative spirit”. In the antagonistic ones, meanwhile, insubordination and the fight against certain aspects of reality that are intended to change take priority. There is a clear objective of transforming the social order and a relevant weight of commitment and militancy is observed. In these cooperatives, the autonomous dimension refers both to the internal level of the cooperative –to the freedom to make decisions about the way of working and relating– as well as to the external plane: from the realization of projects that contribute to social change.

In the configuration of cooperatives of one type or another, three key issues are identified: the objectives pursued, personal participation, and the consideration of personal needs. Regarding the objectives, a distinction is made between economic and ideological ones. About participation, a difference is made between group participatory models, led participatory models and delegation models. Also, the types of leadership, gender inequalities, and the existence of dependent workers are addressed. Finally, on the level of personal needs, internal agreements are identified that seek to contemplate issues such as care, or variable remuneration based on the different needs of the workers. In this matter, it is also found that the issue of personal fulfillment through work and self-recognition is relevant.

In this second level of analysis, it is concluded that the consolidation of antagonistic cooperatives, with a greater social impact, is related to the presence of ideological objectives, participatory models and a broad consideration of the reproductive plane and personal needs. For its part, the formation of subordinate cooperatives occurs when there are strong economic restrictions and when individualistic logics are reproduced, with a lack of participation and involvement of the members.

Another result of the research consists of the distinction between three notions associated with autonomy, a central issue for cooperativism and self-management. Based on the study, a distinction is made between: 1. autonomy as self-determination, which would be linked to a “power to do”, part of a desire or a certain reflexivity and has an impact on self-recognition; 2. autonomy as freedom, which opposes the feeling of oppression, but without implying a reflexivity on the “what for”; and 3. autonomy as vulnerability, which is associated with an unwanted responsibility that brings with it self-management.

The research provides an original theoretical and methodological approach to the study of worker cooperatives. The conceptual triad of subalternity, antagonism and autonomy allow addressing the political dimension of collective work and identifying aspects that would let progress towards emancipatory political subjectivities. The results obtained can be applied to other cooperatives if the particularities of each context are taken into account. In this sense, it

is essential to consider; among other things, the activity carried out by the cooperative, since this determines the dependence on the State, the daily dynamics of work, etc. In the same way, the analytical tool can be useful for the analysis of other social and solidarity economy entities.