

Expanded abstract

A first approach to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in industrial cooperatives in Catalonia

Objectives

There is a remarkable proliferation of recent works in the literature aimed at studying the role of companies in sustainable development, in their environmental, social or economic sphere. This research delves into the role of impact and the role of business in sustainability.

The purpose of this research is to make a first approximation to observe the extent to which industrial cooperatives in Catalonia have internalized the need to incorporate the criteria of economic, social and environmental sustainability linked to the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda and to what extent they apply and develop them.

Design and Methodology

This paper uses data obtained from a survey sent to the 248 active Catalan industrial cooperatives, obtained from the General Register of Cooperatives of the Generalitat de Catalunya in November 2021. The questionnaire was designed with clear and specific questions, with dichotomous responses; of very limited duration, plausible to be answered in a few minutes; and where the anonymity of the responses was guaranteed (Rodríguez-Ardura & Meseguer-Artola, 2020). The survey was sent by e-mail and conducted by telephone. After telephone contact, the total was reduced to 236 cooperatives, while 12 were no longer active or had changed their corporate name. A total of 75 responses were obtained, 62 by telephone and 13 by e-mail. Thus, 31.8% of the total responded, which implies a significant degree of statistical representativeness.

The survey has three clearly differentiated blocks of questions that respond to three distinct objectives. The first objective is to find out the degree of involvement, knowledge, commitment and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda in Catalan companies. The second objective is to find out if Catalan industrial cooperatives are committed to some of the milestones incorporated in the SDGs and in which they have a leading role to be achieved, and which have to do with the Planet, as well as with People and Prosperity. The third block refers to whether cooperatives implement actions linked to the SDGs, to what degree and what they are.

To better contextualise the data obtained, the questionnaire included in *L'agenda 2030 vista per les empreses catalanes* has been used within *the framework of the Business Climate Survey for the first quarter of 2019* prepared by the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce and Idescat; in

this way, the information obtained allows a comparative framework to be made with capitalist-based companies and to investigate whether, indeed, there are different behaviours, which are closer to the achievement of the SDGs by cooperatives.

Findings

The exploratory study indicates that there seems to be a greater awareness in cooperatives, since in the first part of the comparative analysis it shows that 100% of the cooperatives that responded to the survey stated that they are aware of helping the sustainable development of society, compared to 96.4% of the total number of Catalan companies surveyed in the study for the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce; If we look at Catalan industrial companies, this value rises to 98.3% of the total number of Catalan industrial companies. This value is very similar to that of cooperatives, which shows the commitment to help in this sector.

67% of the cooperatives surveyed are aware of the sustainable development goals of the 2030 agenda, however, 92% show their commitment towards their adoption, when informed of the content of the SDGs. In contrast to this, only 39.5% of capitalist-based companies say they are aware of the SDGs, rising to 44.3% of companies that are committed to these goals once they are made aware of their content. There is an increase in values when we focus on Catalan industrial companies, as values increase to 44% and 48% respectively. As we can see, these values are very different but better than in other sectors other than industry.

64% of the cooperatives that responded to the questionnaire have a corporate social responsibility plan where the SDGs can be aligned and 52% have introduced changes in the management model to respond to the SDGs compared to only 40.7% and 41.3% respectively of Catalan companies, increasing in the Catalan industrial sector to 42.8% and 44.3%.

The cooperatives surveyed say that 43% have access to what the SDGs mean and how they can be achieved, while only 14% of companies say they do. The same pattern as above is repeated: the Catalan industrial sector shows values close to those of cooperatives, but always lower.

On the other hand, the commitment of cooperatives to actions related to the planet is total, since this is manifested by almost 100% of them, however in capitalist-based companies this is reduced to 75%. The same is true of actions related to people, with the exception of wages, and of actions related to prosperity and innovation.

It is therefore concluded that cooperatives manifest a greater commitment both to the planet and to measures related to people's well-being, prosperity and innovation.

Limitations

The responses obtained from 75 of the 236 active industrial cooperatives in Catalonia as of November 2021 represent 32% of the total number of industrial cooperatives active in that period. Despite assuming a significant degree of statistical representativeness, it does not allow the results to be extrapolated to all cooperatives.

On the other hand, the study is territorially framed in Catalonia, presenting a first photograph with a descriptive and exploratory base delimited territorially. It would also be necessary to expand to a much larger sample, incorporating more variables that allow a more in-depth analysis to be carried out that helps to present even more consistent conclusions.

Original value, implications and practice conclusions

The results obtained after this study coincide with those authors who argue that cooperativism (and the Social Economy) is a business and organizational concept that is framed with the SDGs, and therefore represent a significant contribution to their achievement.

Comparative analysis with capitalist-based firms has helped to understand the extent to which industrial cooperatives seem to have a greater propensity towards sustainable management. In its three areas of application, environmental, social and economic, the study presents remarkable results. Thus, the precepts and principles of cooperativism represent a necessary condition that explains this differential. The ability to naturally incorporate aspects such as equity, equality, impact or environmental sustainability into their business conception is at the basis of this differential.

This relevance is even more evident given that the data obtained from the survey are not, for the most part, the result of a premeditated and structured plan, since there is a high degree of ignorance about the meaning of the SDGs, as well as an almost unconscious tendency in their application.

Despite the fact that the results obtained are substantially different from those obtained from *the 2030 agenda as seen by Catalan companies*, it is pertinent to point out that the percentage of cooperatives that do not have a plan, nor do they know about, nor apply policies aimed at the SDGs is not smaller. In this sense, the results suggest a subsequent phase of research to clarify the causes of this significant percentage of responses from cooperatives that ignore the adoption of the SDGs and, therefore, do not incorporate sustainability into their business practices. We therefore warn of the need to establish nuances on the implications that the implicit assumption of cooperative principles may have in organizations whose legal formulation is the cooperative.

This research allows us to obtain a first approximation to the knowledge of Catalan industrial cooperatives and specifically to the relationship between the role of the Social Economy and cooperativism in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The results obtained can be used both to identify the current state of industrial cooperatives in Catalonia with respect to the SDGs, and to propose actions or measures for improvement, if it is necessary.