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Cooperative Management in Rio Grande do Norte: A Case Study in Thecoopervida - Mossoro - RN, Brazil

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Abstract

In mid80ths, Brazil began to promote economic activities, increasing investment in new technologies as a more effective political strategy. During this period occurred the emergence of cooperatives, a system based on economic and social perspectives. The study investigates the management model implemented by the COOPERVIDA - (Service Advisory Cooperative) from 1999 to 2018. We collected dataabout the tools used by the cooperative in its daily management and operation from the perspective of administration. The case study comprised two steps: exploratory research and data analysis. The information validatedby applying interviewswith structured question naires to cooperative's partners. Throughout its history, the institution had 18 directors, nineadministrative and ninefinancial coordination, and quite diverse membership composition. Agronomy engineers assumed most of the mandates for director function over the history of COOPERVIDA.Only three mandates were occupied by women, two administrative and one financial coordination

Keywords: Management. Cooperatives. Administration. Exploratory research

INTRODUCTION

Cooperatives emergedin Brazil as an alternative to workers who saw, for some reason, their jobs being undervalued or extinct. The possibility of self-organization of work that culminated with a process of self-management of production and income seemed hope of freedom and autonomy to workers who suffered from forced labor routines.

In Brazil, the cooperativesbeganin the agricultural sector.Farmerswere the first to implement the cooperative model in their activities in 1930. However, over the years the model underwent many distortions and became much like the authoritarian regimes implemented by employers to employees.

Since the 1930s, the Brazilian cooperatives constituted an essential instrument of agricultural policy. In the late 1950s, the strong state stimulus to modernize agriculture turned it into one of the main drivers of rural development and improved the country integration to the international market.

Agricultural cooperatives became the link between family farming and modern production systems, contributing to agricultural units acquire business profile, articulating producers, public development institutions, and consumer market. Notably, during the processes of organizational concentration, economic growth, and territorial expansion, the agricultural cooperatives accumulated contradictions and crises, with limits and changes intheir operating strategies (DUARTE, 2006).

The cooperative model of self-management was consolidated only in the 1980s. According to Duarte (2006), the late 80s marked the beginning of a new phase in cooperatives, geared for dynamic economic activities, investment in new technologies, and more effective political strategies.

In this sense, the concept of self-management should be understood as a denial of hetero-management. However, the idea of self-management has also been applied interchangeably to refer to management processes that not fully meet all the essential constituent elements of a self-management, in other words, do not comprisea complete denial of hetero-management, for example, studies that apply the concept tosolidarity economy enterprises and its correlates (e.g., recovered factories, labor unions) (BUSNARDO, 2006; CANÇADO, 2004; CARVALHO, 2012; DICKMANN; DICKMANN, 2015; FARIA, 2005; PEDRINI, 2000; PEDRINI; SOUZA, 2000; TAUILLE and RODRIGUES, 2004; VERARDO, 2003; FARIAS, 2017).

According to Pinho (2000), a cooperative comprises an economic and social system aimed at welf are and social peace through the defense of the interests of producers and consumers. Whatever member, regardless of their economic and political power, is entitled to only one vote at meetings.

At the twentieth century, Brazilian cooperatives movedto ideological duplicity of action. Thus

institutionsbegan to act in different fields. Some cooperatives advocate and work with the traditional business model whileothers defend and work aspopular resistance cooperatives (SICOOB, 2016).

The globalization of production and the need for skilled labor shaped the cooperatives to a new reality, creating new fields of operation. According to the Brazilian Credit Cooperatives System (SICOOB), nowadays, there are 13 fields of cooperatives action in Brazil: agricultural, consumers, credit, educational, housing, infrastructure, mining, production, health, social, labor, transport, and tourism and leisure.

Our case study was carried out in the COOPERVIDA work cooperative, which is defined, in art. 2 of Pub.L. No. 12,690/2012, as a company formed by workers to carry out their work or professional activities, with common good, autonomy and self-management, in order to obtain better qualifications, income, socioeconomic status, and general conditions for job. Within thework cooperative branch, according to the above cited law, there are two classes: Production Cooperative - when made up of members who contribute to the joint production of goods, and the cooperative holdsmeans of production; and Service Cooperative - when made by partners to provide specialized services to third parties, without need of employment relationship.

COOPERVIDA - Service Advisory Cooperative, is specifically typified as a worker cooperative to provide service. The cooperative brings this specificity on the first page of itsStatute and as contained in the National Register of Legal Entities – CNPJ, corporate is a Working Cooperative for Assistance and Multiple Service Provision for Rural Development .

When defining the scope of this work, we focused on studying the management model implemented by COOPERVIDA from 1999 to 2018. The study aims to collect data about tools used by the cooperative in its daily operational management at the administrative point of view. The results willserve as a basis for future research andpeople interested in knowing and implementing a management methodology that has worked 19 years in a worker cooperative.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This case study comprises both quantitative and qualitative investigations. Vieira (2005 cited LUDKE; ANDRÉ 1986) describes the qualitative analysis as essentially descriptive, often using transcripts of interviews, statements, and quotes that allow corroborate on results and offer some points of view. Günther (2006) states that quantitative research attempts to get maximum control over the environment, including producing artificial environments to reduce or eliminate the interference variables considered irrelevant.

We delimited our study object to Working Cooperative for Assistance and Multiple Service Provision for Rural Development – COOPERVIDA because of the relevance of the subject and the type of activity carried out by the institution to meet the goal of analyzing the management of cooperatives in Rio Grande do Norte.

At first, we visited the cooperative to inform the research objectives, request authorization, and plan actions for the study. The types of documents to be used were identified, and the list of possible partners for interviews was accomplished according to the profile and function as Administrative and Financial Coordinator. Paiva (2016) reported that the use of these instruments is a way of obtaining data of different types, which enables to cross-reference information.

The information in documents was tabulated in Microsoft Excel® spreadsheets to build tables and graphs. The interviews were carried outin a flexible process with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, all were recorded by the *Audio Recorder* voice recorder application and transcribed with *Speechnotes* Program.

Due to the volume of data and information generated on interviews, excerpts were chosen in order to condense the material and meet the demands of the objective of this research, according to the methodology suggested by Mayring (2002). The tabular and descriptive analyses allow reporting the characteristics of a specific population or phenomenon without manipulating it, in

other words, without the interference of the researcher(Hart1983).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Working Cooperative for Assistance and Multiple Service Provision for Rural Development – COOPERVIDA – arosefrom anintenseprocess of collective debate of a new proposal for technical assistance focused on agroecology and peasant-based (PAIVA, 2016). A cooperative emerges from the union of persons whose individual work needs, traders and persons supplying services group, and their social, political and economic interests, mergedwith the collective goals of the association (OLIVEIRA, 2000).

"One of the questions always preserved since the COOPERVIDA was the political line within the agroecology, the autonomy of farmers, and the leadership of these farmers." BEZERRA JR, AN; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 26 September 2018.

The organization was founded on November 21, 1999, in the city of Mossoró/RN and currently consists of 31 members according to minutes of the institution. Since its inception, there were nine mandates of Administrative Coordination and nine 09 of Financial Coordination. Ten cooperative members held the 18 mandates (Table 1 and 2).

Table 1: Members mandates and their positions

Table 1: Members mandates and their positions					
PERIOD	ASSUMED POSITION	MEMBER			
1999 – 2002	Administrative coordinator	Fabricio Barbosa Edino Jales			
	Financial coordinator	José Flaviano Barbosa Lira			
2002 – 2005	Administrative coordinator	Joseph of Arimathea Morais			
	Financial coordinator	José Flaviano Barbosa Lira			
2005 – 2007	Administrative coordinator	Francisca Gomes Torres Daughter			
	Financial coordinator	Fabricio Barbosa Edino Jales			
2007 – 2009	Administrative coordinator	Francisca Gomes Torres Daughter			
	Financial coordinator	Fabricio Barbosa Edino Jales			
2009 – 2011	Administrative coordinator	José Edson Albuquerque Araújo			
	Financial coordinator	Antonio Bezerra Junior Nilton			
2011 – 2013 Administrative coordinator Financial coordinator	Administrative coordinator	Neurivan Vicente da Silva			
	Raniere Barbosa Lira				
2013 – 2015	Administrative coordinator	Neurivan Vicente da Silva			
	Financial coordinator	José Edson Albuquerque Araújo			
2015 – 2017	Administrative coordinator	Raniere Barbosa Lira			
	Financial coordinator	Jeane Barbosa Flag			
2017 – 2018	Administrative coordinator	Raniere Barbosa Lira			
	Financial coordinator	Georg Carlos Fernandes Nunes			

Source: Research data, in 2018.

Table 2: Mandates by partner

MEMBER	MANDATES	ASSUMED POSITION	
Antonio Bezerra Junior Nilton	1	Financial coordinator	
Georg Carlos Fernandes Nunes	1	Financial coordinator	
Fabricio Barbosa Edino Jales	3	Administrative Coordinator (1)	
Fabricio Bardosa Edino Jales 3		Financial Coordinator (2)	
Francisca Gomes Torres Daughter	2	Administrative Coordinator (2)	
Jeane Barbosa Flag	1	Financial coordinator	
Joseph of Arimathea Morais	1	Administrative coordinator	
José Edson Albuquerque Araújo	2	Administrative Coordinator (1) Financial	
Jose Edson Albuquelque Alaujo		Coordinator(1)	
José Flaviano Barbosa Lira	2	Financial Coordinator (2)	
Neurivan Vicente da Silva	2	Administrative Coordinator (2)	
Raniere Barbosa Lira	3	Administrative Coordinator (2)	
Kamere Datousa Liia	3	Financial Coordinator (1)	
Grand total	18		

Source: Research data, in 2018.

In the period of COOPERVIDA foundation, the discussion of social movements was very intense in defense of minorities (family farmers, peasants, indigenous, maroons and riverine). It also led to the establishment of various institutions focused onminorities defense. Costa, Amorim Júnior and Silva (2015), differently, found that most of the family farm cooperatives in Minas Gerais (58%) started after 2003, 26% before 2003 and 16% did not report the year of establishment. A change in the civil codein Minas Gerais may have caused differences between the beginning of foundation of cooperatives because farmers already organized into associations had to organize themselves into cooperatives.

COOPERVIDA based its coordination in democratic management. There is a turnover of people in managerial roles registered in records, minutes and cooperative speeches. Also, there are still careful to protect all statutory framework that ensures the democratic participation of members in important decisions. The administrative organization COOPERVIDA has the following management and control structures: General Meeting, Board of Directors and Audit Committee. This strategy leads to a transparent performance of the management and results of their actions.

"Our management was always based on democratic principles, always consulting other partners when need more complex decisions. For daily decisions, we always try to guide us by the bylaws of the organization. For major decisions, where we believe that the status and discussion between other members do not give a satisfactory answer, then, we resort to the General Assembly of the institution, where we can discuss and decide the best way with the participation of all members." TLC Nunes; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 28 September 2018.

Barbosa, former Financial Coordinator, reinforces Nunes speech:

"COOPERVIDA management is governed by a statute, consisting of Coordinations (Finance and Administration) thatmake daily decisions during a given mandate. It is noteworthy that the final decisions are taken by the consensus of both coordination, but there is a participative management concerning the power of decision of team leaders, advised by such coordination. In this dynamic, weekly meetings for planning and transfer of activities to improve processes and decisions are made. There is also the existence of an Advisory Board, informal, giving a support to the most complicated decisions". Barbosa, JB; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 28 September 2018.

The management model identified here resembles that found by Ferreira (1999). According to Ferreira (1999), there are several forms of management and participation of the general organizations. In the case of cooperatives, idealized forms of administration are focused on the practice of self-management, autonomy and participatory democracy, which are not always accepted by all branches of the cooperative, since these institutions have specific interests and needs. Cooperatives represent, therefore, a peculiar activity within the economic system, with its characteristics that differ from types of organizations. Conceptually, cooperatives are participating associations: the cooperative person participates in operations and decisions.

Below is a description of cooperatives as tools of management control and monitoring used by COOPERVIDA:

"Weekly meetings; field reports; banking reconciliations; internal audit at the end of each fiscal calendar by the supervisory board; visual presentation providing account once a year at the General Meeting and external auditing and publication of the annual report of accountability in the institutional site". SILVA, NV; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN September 25th, 2018.

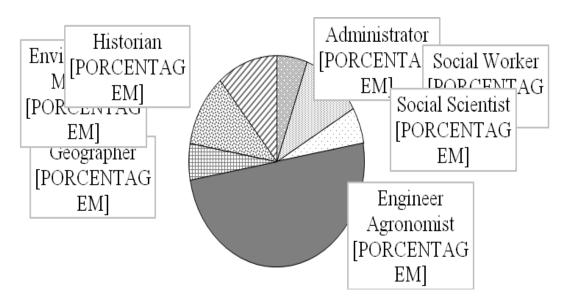
Lira, Administrative Coordinator, reinforce:

Activities and projects evaluation raise impasses to contribute to the formulation of a guiding document to minimize errors of beginners teams on projects. Systematization conducted by the project team of the execution of activities and the barriers. Process of formalizing for future teams have a handout to follow. Use spreadsheets to monitor the development of project activities in courses and field activity reports and weekly meetings. LIRARB; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 27 September 2018.

We found that the professional profile of COOPERVIDA managing partners is quite diverse, because the skill and theoretical and practical knowledge are specific to each profession, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 3.In an interview, Torres Filha reports:

"That's what we most thought to deconstruct, the COOPERVIDA boxes of professionals. We had many agronomists, they were majority. We, people who thought in the social area, often in other entities, we came like a contribution to think the entity. We never thought of COOPERVIDA so [...] our idea was not to be an agricultural cooperative, the agricultural world cannot be explained only by an agronomist. This was our ability and we together tried to deconstruct these separation of power relations where the agronomist has the technical knowledge and the social worker, sociologist, historian, educator, would only respond to social issues. We try to deconstruct many teams with that". TORRES FILHA, FG; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 27 September 2018.

Figure 1. Composition of the administrative and financial teams of COOPERVIDA from the aspect of training



Source: Research data, in 2018.

Table 3: List of terms (Administrative and Financial Coordination), vocational training and years of experience

TRAINING / COORDINATION	COUNT MANDATES	TIME OF ACTIVITY IN YEARS
Administrative coordinator	9	-
Social worker	2	04
Agronomist	3	07
Geographer	1	02
Environmentalmanager	2	04
Historian	1	02
Financial coordinator	9	-
Manageress	1	02
Social scientist	1	02
Agronomist	6	13
Historian	1	02

Grand total 18

Source: Research data, in 2018.

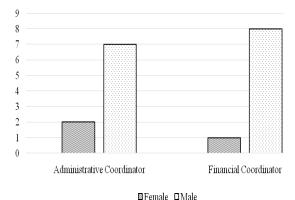
COOPERVIDA has always based its activities on the theme of gender in communities focusing on women as protagonists, to become leaders in positions of political representations, such as associations, trade unions, and rural workers. It brings the debate to empower women to the center of the discussion. It emphasizes that the male and female social roles do not exist in isolation but through a mutual partnership of coexistence.

So Torres Filha, said in an interview:

"Going to the coordination was a result of the feminist movement, we needed to be in positions of power. It was necessary that women occupy the spaces in associations, trade unions and in these instances. And, with the diagnosis made by CF8 in Apodi semi-arid region reflected that it was necessary to stop being only secretaryin the entities, it was necessary to be in the coordination administrative and financial, and stop being second, second secretary, second treasurer, vice coordinator, no longer stand to keep this invisibility. The movement itself made us wake up to this we had a lot of fear because it was a men power space." TORRES FILHA, FG; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 27 September 2018.

Even with the concern of the institution towards the training and empowerment of women in rural areas to be protagonists in their spaces, our data shows22% of women and 78% of men for Administrative Coordination, and 11% of women and 89% of men for Financial Coordination. Therefore, these results means that from the 18 mandates, only three were coordinated by women and these have been exercised only by two women (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Gender composition of the Administrative and Financial Coordination of COOPERVIDA.



Source: Research data, in 2018.

Our results confirm the found by Battagliola (2000), whostated that a bit more than 10% of female

labor belonged to the category of "executive and higher education professions". And, we corroborated with Marry (2004) on women engineers: a respectful revolution, showingan increase to 11.2% in 2002.

Faria (1995) analysis that the concept "gender" also considers in today's society that the relationship between men and women are unequal: they are hierarchy and power relations of men over women.

One of the major bottlenecks for theactive life of an institution of the cooperative work branch is the financial health. In the case of COPERVIDA, whose work is based on projects to meet the public of family farming, and all their budget comes from public calls, whether public company announcements, private or government institutions, the financial sustainability isquite complicated in times of economic crises.

In an interview, Jales informs the initial difficulties to get resources to the projects:

"We participate in many meetings at the State level to seek to develop our ideas, our thoughts, put in practice what we were building regarding strategic planning for the institution itself. We seek in various ways to develop projects, but we always stopped due to difficulties in access because we were a new organization, with less than 2 or 3 years. We did not have historical experience, accumulated experience as a legal institution. It barred all our financial possibilities". JALES, FEB; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN September 25th, 2018.

Schulze (1987) reports that cooperatives are the only sector of the economy whose doctrine has its emphasis on balance between economic and social aspects. Beyond the challenges often imposed by the markets, cooperatives still have to preserve its relations with members, who are at the same time, owners, customers and suppliers (SCHULZE, 1987). Then they can fulfill their primary role, that is, to meet the collective aspirations rather than individual aspirations.

According to Antonialli (2000), the fundamental issue in cooperatives is to find the balance between three different levels of interests of members: economic, social and political. Manage them is a difficult and complicated task.

Araujo says that to smooth and balance the interests of members, they had to:

"The idea of collectivizingthe maximum possible actions, which could have a group and a higher number of peopleaware of what was happening at all. Because even when it came to certain issues, failures or problems, we could solve better. Instead of having one or two talking heads, we had a larger volume of people think. In this sense, we begin to create at that time an instance beyond the purview of the Administrative Coordination with the idea of a Council. Where the composition is made by the

Founding Partners, who occasionally, we sought to assemble and call to talk, so they could have some light on a problem, or claim some action in walking". José Edson Albuquerque Araujo, JEA; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 26 September 2018.

Therefore, according to Baldus and Willens, cited by Pine (1966), from a sociological point of view, cooperation is a form of social integration and can be understood as joint action in which people come together formally or informally, to achieve the same goal.

Situation evidenced in COOPERVIDA by the following speeches:

"The labor relationship in COOPERVIDA is always within the Cooperative format. It is a constructed action, and even the agendas are being built as the dialogues. Despite we had few professionals in COOPERVIDA concerning work in projects because the time has required few projects in this period, but the actions are very active, of construction of labor relations with partners through dialogue. We always maintain the relationship betweenthe use of law and participatory relationship building". LIRA, R.B.; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN 26 September 2018.

The above speech was corroborated by Silva in a courtesy interview:

"In the cooperative system, there were two possible ways of use for service contracts. As **COOPERVIDA** has its funding from public resources calls, some guidelines made by such lenders are obeyed. Thus, some members are hired in CLT regime, in other words, followthe rules of the Labor Code, and others work in the cooperative act of regime, applying the arrangements included in the law of cooperatives for execution of work".SILVA, N.V.; Interview by Antonio Dantas Neto. Mossoro / RN September 25th, 2018.

Moreover, as a concern of COOPERVIDA about workers rights, COOPERVIDA need to check in each case the presence or absence of the features of the employment relationship as well as the form of management and operation of cooperative societies to know the real nature of the work performed. Always observing legal and social factors so there is no malice or reduction in social rights of workers and members. Making clear the democratic and participatory tool of cooperatives for professional, educational and social development.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the history of COOPERVIDA, from 1999 to 2018, eighteen directors headed the board, nine Administrative and nine Financial. Over this period, the institution adopted a participatory management methodology, where each person could only assume the same position for a maximum of two mandates with two years each, that is, a person could stay a maximum of four years in the coordination. In 2017 the institution updated its Statute and the mandates' time

rose from twoforthree years, but participatory management model has been maintained.

The administrative conduction of COOPERVIDA features high turnover among elected to head the management. During the time of the cooperative existence,ten membersledthe administrative and financial coordinator positions. This turnover ratesuggests a concern for the continuity of the institution, as the flexibility to allow new members to lead the institution enables the learning and the emergence of new leaders who contribute to renewinternal processes and innovatethe actions. Among theseten people who toke coordination positions, only two headed three mandates.

The composition of the membership of COOPERVIDA is quite diverse. There areten areas of academic degree, and among these, there is high diversity: agronomy engineers, social scientists, historians, veterinarians, environmental managers, administrators, pedagogues, agronomists, agricultural technicians, and animal technicians.

Among all these areas, the agronomy engineers assumedmost of the mandates for coordination of COOOPERVIDA, around 50% since its foundation.In contrast, administrators got the lowest access, about 5%.

Only two administrative coordination and one financial coordination was led by women, totaling three terms. Assessing the women empowerment in the process of management and decision, we verified the absence of proportionality, that is, women could not occupy a space similar to men, who led seven mandates as administrative coordinators and eight as financial coordinators.

The observation of the disparity regarding gender leadership is surprising because the interviewees emphasized the effort of COOPERVIDA towards increasing thewomen's trust so that they can pursue their autonomy and equality in family and work relationships.

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