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Towards a societal-centered framework for the cooperative movement

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It has been almost two centuries since the emergence of the cooperative movement as a reflection of the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society. The emerging financial problems of the popular classes constituted the impetus for the establishment of the first cooperatives, through which the working class tried to safeguard its material power and its social position which was threatened.

Two centuries later, in post-industrial or programmed society the social challenges differ considerably, and the emergence of new social movements gives new content and meanings to collective action. Furthermore, we take into consideration that a) at this conference the exhortation “Rethinking cooperatives” is based on a new strategic vision and b) ICA, in its ten-year strategic plan, diagnoses specific challenges such as “the intensity of socio-economic inequalities, the role of the financial system in global financial instability, the lack of trust in political institutions” etc. Since ICA mentions the key role that the Cooperative Movement (C.M) could play in “ensuring universal access to food, education, housing and health”, it is now proposed to trace new elements related with the cooperatives’ identity.

Through Sociology of social movements and collective action, we propose to study the “cooperative” as a potential movement within the sociological framework. We will develop the ways in which the cooperative movement can reframe its identity and strategy by setting new *frame processes* for cooperativism, solidarity, justice, and democracy with an emphasis on their externalization. The article proposes the direction of highlighting the social and political nature of the above-mentioned challenges as a key pillar of bridging the identity of cooperatives and social becoming. A direction that another “movement”, Social Solidarity Economy sets at the center of its analysis and action, while its actors propose a new social regulation, a new citizenship in addition to the collective benefit. We believe that the salient feature of the cooperative structure in combination with the societal nature of SSE, together with its connection with extra-institutional social movements, could be seen as a part of the new strategy of C.M that will be able to face the socio-economic challenges of the 21st.

Keywords: cooperatives, collective action, social movements, frames