

**Outlines of Cooperativism on the Northern Border of Mexico:
The Case of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua**
**Contornos del cooperativismo en la frontera norte de México:
El caso de Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua**

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the article is to present a panoramic analysis of cooperativism in Ciudad Juarez. A concurrent mixed method organized in two parallel phases is used: quantitative and qualitative. The documentary research consisted of reviewing newspaper sources and public archives to identify the legally constituted cooperatives. Observation techniques and semi-structured in-depth interviews were used. The main results are the outline of the background of cooperativism in Ciudad Juarez, its contours, and its macroeconomic presence. It also analyzes the correspondence of the management, practices, and values of the cooperative universe and the ideology and proposal of the social and solidarity economy. As an exploratory study, this article contributes to the documentation, reflection, and research on this subject, since the performance, practices, values, and potential are little known. The main limitation of the research is the lack of complete, transparent, and reliable statistical data on cooperativism.

Keywords: 1. cooperativism, 2. social economy, 3. solidarity economy, 4. Ciudad Juarez, 5. northern border.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del artículo es presentar un análisis panorámico del cooperativismo en Ciudad Juárez. Se utiliza un método mixto concurrente organizado en dos fases paralelas: cuantitativa y cualitativa. La investigación documental consistió en revisar fuentes hemerográficas y archivos públicos para identificar las cooperativas legalmente constituidas. Se utilizaron las técnicas de observación y entrevistas semiestructuradas a profundidad. Los principales resultados consisten en el esbozo de los antecedentes del cooperativismo en Ciudad Juárez, sus contornos y su presencia macroeconómica. Así mismo, se analiza la correspondencia de la gestión, las prácticas y los valores del universo cooperativo con el ideario y la propuesta de la economía social y solidaria. Como estudio exploratorio, este artículo aporta a la documentación la reflexión y la investigación al respecto, ya que son poco conocidos el desempeño, las prácticas, los valores y las potencialidades del cooperativismo. La principal limitación de la investigación es la falta de los datos estadísticos completos, transparentes y confiables en torno al cooperativismo.

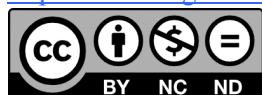
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INTRODUCTION

There are three cities at the Mexico-US border encompassed in the metropolitan area known as *Paso del Norte*: Ciudad Juárez, El Paso and Las Cruces. This region comprises three states (Chihuahua, Texas and New Mexico) and two countries (Mexico and the U.S.).² This region is considered the largest industrial manufacturing hub in North America (The Borderplex Alliance, 2020) and it is inhabited by a population of 2.5 million people. Due to its border condition the *Paso del Norte* region is characterized by the establishment of an economic model mainly supported upon Exporting Maquiladora Industries (EMI). The region has high growth and competitiveness at global level, for it has abundant labor force, large long-term producers, integral logistics, transport networks and some of the largest military assets in North America (The Borderplex Alliance, 2020).

In parallel to the development of a pushing region, vast population sectors are affected by the precarious conditions this industrial sector generates by exploiting, depleting, and discarding human beings in pursuit of productivity and low costs (Jusidman & Almada, 2008), for they offer their employees poorly encouraging life expectations, a poverty trap. The population is poor because structurally it does not have opportunities to develop and it does not do so because no sufficient public investment is received to address social and infrastructure needs, neither does the private remains to face the internal market and constantly attract other capitals (Padilla Delgado, Olivas Andrade & Alvarado Salas, 2014). In the case of Ciudad Juárez, where 1 512 450 people live (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [Inegi], 2021), 26.4 percent live in poverty conditions (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social [Coneval], 2015). Adding to this poverty panorama, there is a crisis of extreme violence. In comparison with 2017, in 2020 it is noticed that the number of murders doubled, while violent robberies and kidnappings increased (Plan Estratégico de Juárez A. C., 2020). Owing to this, one of the main concerns of the population is the insecurity experienced in the city.

In this desolating context, product of the capitalist system, Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) practices are created as part of an alternative transformation project; these promote local development by taking part in the various phases of the economic cycle: production, circulation, consumption and accumulation, producing in this mobilization collective awareness and will which operate under a democratic organization and logic of action (Razeto Migliaro, 1993). Such experiences motivated the interest in studying cooperatives in Ciudad Juárez.

Although cooperativism appears as a response from the communities to the crisis of civilization, which turns into social, economic, and political crises, to solve their most pressing needs, it is also true that cooperatives coexist within the capitalist system. This way, it is necessary to wonder whether they are favorable for the hegemonic system, that is to say, if they

² Although the reference here it to the three urban centers, the *Paso del Norte* region also comprises rural settlements in the Valley of Juárez such as Guadalupe, Praxedis G. Guerrero, and El Porvenir; Fort Hancock, Tornillo, Fabens, Socorro, Sunland Park, Santa Teresa, Canutillo, Vinton, and Anthony, in Texas; and, Berino, Vado, Mesquite, Mesilla and Doña Ana County in New Mexico.

are alternative economic practices, or conversely, they are exercises in moralized capitalism (Collin Harguindeguy, 2012). In like manner, Díaz Muñoz (2015) has pointed out there are practices of solidarity pseudo-economy among which there are cooperative societies that work as cover and disguise for capitalists enterprises the author calls pseudo-cooperatives.

From this standpoint, the goal of the article is to carry out an analytical overview of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez that allows assessing its concordance in the logic of SSE. To do so, we enquire on the way cooperatives in Ciudad Juárez are part of an alternative transformation project in concurrence with the logic of SSE. To offer an answer, we research whether cooperatives in Ciudad Juárez are functional for the dominant economic model or, on the contrary, they are associative experiences that work under cooperative principles and values. This is important because, as opposed to what may be supposed about cooperativism, it is common to find difficulties and contradictions in the ideals and experiences of cooperative societies. As a hypothesis it is put forward that the cooperative movement undergoes a contraction phase for, as presented following, in the local sphere there is a decrease in the number of people and organizations, and in spite of the existence of various cooperative societies, not all abide by the ideals, practices and management proper to cooperativism, and there is even an environment of rupture and disillusionment.

A concurrent mixed method was resorted to, whilst research work was organized in two parallel phases: quantitative and qualitative. Printed information sources were reviewed and allowed sketching the background of cooperativism in the city, public archives were consulted to identify the legally constituted cooperatives and look at their constitutive acts; a database was produced with a universe of 269 legally established cooperative societies in Ciudad Juárez between 1974 and 2020. For fieldwork, a non-probabilistic sampling was carried out, which reduced the universe to slightly less than 10 percent. Twenty-six cooperative societies were selected following criteria such as activity, temporality, and amount of social contribution. Observation techniques were applied, and in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with 18 cooperative members which, as a set, have been partners in 16 cooperative societies. Data were analyzed using the movement cycle matrix tool proposed by The Movement Netlab,³ which allows identifying the phase of the movement and understanding the working areas and roles fulfilled by organizations (U.S. Solidarity Economy Network, 2017).

At the beginning of the article, the conceptual framework allows understanding cooperativism as part of the SSE movement, but also the complexity of its insertion in the capitalist system. Following, present-day cooperativism is located at global, national, regional, state and local levels. Then, its background is briefly exposed, it is stated that industrialization triggered cooperativism in the city. Finally, cooperativism is analyzed as an expression of SSE over the period from 2000 to 2020, emphasizing the second decade, i.e., 2010-20. This term is a contraction phase, and is

³ The Movement NetLab is a think tank which comprises social-movement activists and researchers; it was created for the purpose of developing conceptual and practical tools to strengthen emerging social movements. Its proposal has six phases that relate emotional state and time: 1) enduring crisis; trigger event; 2) uprising; 3) peak; 4) contraction; 5) evolution; and 6) new normal.

approached from the sort of activity (production, distribution, consumption, and savings and loans), activity sector, number of partners, and social contributions.

THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

Current civilization faces the most important global crisis humanity has faced, which is an intersection of opposing forces at global scale. On one side, those that foster capital reproduction; and on the other, those that want the enhanced reproduction of life (Harvey, 2014; Díaz Muñoz, 2015; Fundación Solon, 2020). The dominant forces are represented by economic practices of accumulation, exploitation, militarized states and extractivism that weaken and disintegrate communities (Díaz Muñoz, 2015). Such forces embody the neoliberal capitalist model; this capitalism is understood as “the social system in which processes of capital circulation and accumulation hegemonically prevail at the time of providing and configuring the material, social and intellectual bases for communal life” (Harvey, 2014, p. 22).

Conversely, alternative forces strive to change the world by means of solidarity economy practices that respect and care for the environment, supported on principles and values such as cooperation, mutual help, and solidarity; are created through democratic processes and strive for an associative revolution by creating global networks (Díaz Muñoz, 2015). All of this is materialized in SSE reproductive-logic based practices, becoming an alternative economic model that represents the possibility of another economic logic, thereby a different economic behavior (Collin Harguindeguy, 2012). The study of these allows configuring an alternative model which proposes that another world is possible, and in order to build it, another economy is necessary. Therefore, SSE start from a logic that opposes speculation and profit, and emphasize an enhanced reproduction of life, care for nature and people.

Although these two are opposing forces, they also influence one another. There are contradictions in neoliberal capitalism that produce innovations that improve the quality of life (Harvey, 2014), as well, in capitalism, as a dominant system, there are also non-capitalist forms that may lead to a transition toward an alternative model. Developing this model implies great complexity, not only does it entail the creativity of forging the new, but also the liberation from the models of economic domination, appropriation, repression, and mediation that are organized and structured in global capitalism (Díaz Muñoz, 2015). In this way, the action of SSE is an alternative socioeconomic endeavor, that is, an economic practice inserted in capitalism, but with the intention of transforming it.

Since the debate and theory on SSE are still open and in construction, there is a plurality of concepts to refer to alternative economies: Social Economy (ES), Labor Economy (LE), Solidarity Economy (SE), Popular Economy (PE), and Socio-Economy of Solidarity (SES), among others. Scholars such as Razeto Migliaro (2002), Pérez de Mendiguren, Etxezarreta Etxarri and Guridi Aldanondo (2008), Coraggio (2011), Guerra (2014), and Rojas Herrera (2019) concur on the fact that the projects' implications and forms are so diverse that the most important are the collective experiences that set into motion other forms of making economy.

Conceptually, social economy has been developed mainly in European countries such as France, Spain, Holland (Netherlands) and Germany; for its part, solidarity economy refers to Latin American economic practices. In the United States and England, expressions as varied as nonprofit firm, social venture, social initiative, social-purpose business, shared-asset firms, and nonlucrative organizations, among others, have been used. According to Mutuberría (2008), theoretical discussions on SSE vary between northern and southern countries, that is, social economy and solidarity economy, respectively.

Pérez and Etxezarreta (2015) indicate there are three stances that refer to SSE, and a unified concept as well. The first is the position of those that advocate for keeping and consolidating the concept of social economy and considering solidarity economy as a particular approach with no substantial modifications in their principal elements. The second considers SSE with no differences between concepts, but synonyms. And the third points at the need of respecting the differenced identities of social economy and solidarity economy with the aim of forging theoretical and practical alliances on the concept of SSE.

This last represents our stance when we refer to the SSE movement. We look for the coincidences and the amalgam not only of European and Latin American schools, in the sense of Pérez and Etxezarreta (2015), but also, given the border condition of Ciudad Juárez, it is relevant to include the Anglo-Saxon vision. The cooperative movement in Ciudad Juárez is approached as a component of the SSE movement at global scale with national scope.

However, not every Cooperative Society (CS) is SSE, nor is it only constituted by the cooperative component. Cooperativism is at the core of the two aforementioned opposing forces, as it is conceived in capitalism, it is possible for cooperatives to be capitalists. Historically, it has been considered an alternative model created during the industrial revolution, which consolidated at a key moment in the rise of neoliberal capitalism; at present, it is a global-scale social movement that reasserts right to labor, democratic participation, equality and autonomy.

Nowadays, even though the practices of cooperatives take place in neoliberalism, as social organizations, unlike private enterprises, they are the expression of various associative initiatives that group people with common social and economic needs, so their joint action to satisfy them is configured for collective good instead of individual interests, on the basis of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity (Cattani, Coraggio & Laville, 2009). Albeit, it is necessary to distinguish between cooperative organization and cooperative movement. A cooperative society is “the particular organization of the cooperative system, which carries the social transformation germ heading to abolish profit and salaried regimes to replace them with solidarity and mutual help, without suppressing individual freedom” (Rojas Coria, 1984, p. 671). For its part, cooperative movement is defined as:

Inconformity against economic injustice; rebelliousness against industrial and commercial exploitation institutions; the altruist struggle that takes place time after time to open a way in a world fraught with egotism. The cooperative movement is also a constructive attitude; a constant improvement process; intervention in State agencies to consecrate in the legislation, the new economic, social and juridical principles that are part of its goal (Salinas Puente, 1954, p. 98).

The existence of cooperative societies does not necessarily give life to social movements, they come from permanent and supported action, as a social struggle that comes from disagreement with economic injustice (Salinas Puente, 1954). The cooperative movement produces an alternative proposal of philosophy of life that favors the existence of social solidarity from a new conceptualization of life and labor, ethical behavior, system of thought and action heading to consecrate the new and highest values of universal culture (Rojas Coria, 1984).

In the case of Mexico, Rojas Herrera (2014) indicates that in spite of its historic discontinuity, the analytical approach to cooperativism and SSE has not been developed in Ciudad Juárez, or in any case, in a tangential manner. There exist little documentation, reflection and research in this regard, which keep SSE practices invisible. With the exception of *Sociedad Cooperativa de Seleccionadores de Materiales*, Socosema [Cooperative Society of Material Selectors], there is no record for theoretical and study approaches to the experiences of social and solidarity economy, since they are neither recognized nor studied.

Contextualizing cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez

In order to approach the reality of cooperativism during the last decade in Ciudad Juárez, it is necessary to locate it in the global, national and state, as well as its background. The Global Census on Cooperatives (Organización de las Naciones Unidas, 2014), with information from 145 countries, indicates that by 2014, there were 2.6 million cooperatives around the world, with more than a billion partners and 12.6 million job posts. That year, such cooperatives accumulated 19.6 trillion USD in assets, generating annual incomes of 2.98 trillion USD. This same census registers that in Latin America, there were 42 765 cooperative societies, which comprise 44.1 million associates and created 816 122 job posts. Together, they accumulated slightly more than 83 886 million USD in assets, annually generating more than 18 360 million USD.

In Mexico, there are 18 038 cooperative societies with 8 875 186 partners, of which 12 076 are engaged in consumption, 5 200 in production, and 762 in savings and loans (Rojas Herrera, 2020). In the northern Mexican region, which comprises the north, northwest and northeast subregions,⁴ there are 6 323 of this sort of societies that have 1 625 219 partners (Rojas Herrera, 2020). At the border municipalities of this subregions, one finds 12.4 percent of cooperatives, i.e., 878 organizations. Puerto Peñasco and Juárez concentrate 55.3 percent of this total; the former has 246 cooperative societies, and the latter, 189. Juárez is the second border municipality with the largest number of cooperatives, with 24 percent of the total of border cooperatives (table 1).

⁴ Rojas Herrera (2020) analyzed cooperativism from its distribution by economic region with the classification established by *Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público* [Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit]. For the purposes of the article three regions are retaken: north, comprising the states Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí; northwest, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Sinaloa, and Nayarit; while northeast, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

Table 1. Cooperatives at border municipalities⁵

State	Municipality	Cooperatives
Baja California	Ensenada	52
	Playas de Rosarito	6
	Tijuana	30
	Tecate	2
	Mexicali	52
Sonora	San Luis Río Colorado	71
	Puerto Peñasco	246
	Caborca	42
	Nogales	0
	Cananea	0
Chihuahua	Juárez	189
	Ojinaga	10
Coahuila	Acuña	5
	Jiménez	23
	Piedras Negras	5
Tamaulipas	Nuevo Laredo	3
	Reynosa	7
	Matamoros	44
Total		787

Source: Own elaboration based on data from *Registro Público de Comercio* [Public Commerce Registry] (Secretaría de Economía, 2020).

Following, data from CS will vary depending on the consulted sources. Despite Article 14 of the Law of Social and Solidarity Economy (2019) establishes the functions of *Instituto Nacional de la Economía Social*, INAES [National Institute for Social Economy] “produce and keep up to date the catalogue of various sorts of organizations in the sector”, various sources point that in Mexico there are no complete, transparent and reliable statistics, and even claim there is undefinition regarding the legislation of cooperatives, which at present, also applies for other SSE organizations, which evinces the tendency to denaturalize the SSE movement (Instituto Nacional de la Economía Social y Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla, 2013; Izquierdo Muciño, 2015; Rojas Herrera, 2016, 2020).

⁵ There are 94 municipalities at the northern Mexican border in the states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. The table only displays municipalities with Public Commerce Registry offices, this way the following municipalities were not considered: Sonora: General Plutarco Elías Calles, Altar, Sáric, Santa Cruz, Naco, and Agua Prieta; Chihuahua: Janos, Ascensión, Praxedis G. Guerrero, Guadalupe, Coyame del Sotol, and Manuel Benavides; Coahuila: Ocampo, Zaragoza, Nava, Guerrero, and Hidalgo; Nuevo León: Anáhuac; and Tamaulipas: Guerrero, Mier, Miguel Alemán, Camargo, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Río Bravo, and Valle Hermoso.

According to data from the cooperative catalogue of the *Dirección de Economía Social del Estado de Chihuahua* (2021) [Directorate of Social Economy of the State of Chihuahua], as of the seventies to the present day, in the state above, 960 cooperatives have been registered. However, data from *Registro Público de Comercio* [Public Commerce Registry] (Secretaría de Economía, 2020) differ, as it accounts for 1032 cooperatives registered in the state, being the municipality of Chihuahua the place with the most registrations, followed by Juárez (Table 2). For its part, *Directorio Estadístico Nacional de Unidades Económicas*, DENUE [National Statistical Directory of Economic Units] registers 383 active cooperative societies, with the participation of 139 705 partners, of which the largest number, 343, engages in consumption, 34 in production, six in savings and loans (Rojas Herrera, 2020). In spite of the disparity between amounts, the difference indicates that, out of the total of registered cooperative societies, on average only 38.5 percent of them is still operating.

Table 2. Cooperatives in the state of Chihuahua (1970-2020)

Municipality	Amount
Chihuahua	258
Camargo	33
Nuevo Casas Grandes	69
Cuauhtémoc	112
Delicias	48
Galeana	19
Guerrero	186
Hidalgo Del Parral	85
Jiménez	23
Juárez	189
Ojinaga	10
Total	1 032

Source: Own elaboration based on data from *Registro Público del Comercio* (Secretaría de Economía, 2020).

Considering data from DENUE, in the state of Chihuahua, it is noticed that in spite of the short amount of cooperative societies for savings and loans, these are the ones with the largest number of partners (39 705 individuals). Meanwhile, those engaged in production concentrate 1 150 cooperative members, while those engaged in consumption have 1 855 affiliates (Rojas Herrera, 2020).

For the case of Ciudad Juárez,⁶ data from Secretaría de Economía [Secretariat of Economy] (2020) indicate that between 1974 and 2020, 158 cooperative societies were registered, of which 16 are engaged in consumption, 141 in production, and one in savings and loans, with a total participation of 1 724 members. Breaking down production in goods and services, we find that 35 cooperatives are engaged in production of goods, while 106 societies offer general-public services.

From the boom to the contraction of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez

Even if the background of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez dates back to the early XX century, with the foundation of Ignacio Zaragoza⁷ mutualist society, on March 11th, 1907, it is in the context of industrialization of the city that cooperativism gathered momentum. In 1965, motivated by the implementation of *Programa de Industrialización Fronteriza*, PIF [Border Industrialization Program], this associative process actually starts with the creation of cooperatives for the purpose of facing the attacks of capitalism at the border zone. An instance is the work carried out by *Centro de Orientación de la Mujer Obrera*, COMO [Female Worker Advice Center], an organization created in 1968 with a dual purpose. On one side, provide women, who emigrated to Juárez in increasingly large numbers to work in the factories, with training and advice; while on the other, inform the maquiladora industry and the Mexican government about the social costs of PIF with a view to offering the services necessary to reduce the dehumanization of female workers⁸ (Yudelman, 1993).

In the early life of COMO, among its first activities noticeable were the first census of material selectors, carried out in 1972, and the following year, the foundation of *Sociedad Cooperativa de Consumo de Desperdicios Industriales*, Socodin [Cooperative Society for Industrial Waste Consumption] of Ciudad Juárez, which was created to obtain all manner of goods and services their associates needed to develop their activities, namely: collectors of paper, cardboard, bone, glass, iron waste for storage, classification, and general packaging and sale. In 1975, COMO accompanied the creation of “Guille”, a production cooperative owned and operated by workers, engaged in doll and piñata making sold at Sears Roebuck in Dallas, which later entered into the production of uniforms for maquiladoras (Yudelman, 1993). That same year, with an established education program, the organization accompanied 224 material

⁶ While the municipality of Juárez comprises Ciudad Juárez and other localities such as San Isidro, Loma Blanca, Samalayuca, and San Agustín, for the purpose of the present article we make a distinction between cooperatives created in the municipality of Juárez (189) and those in Ciudad Juárez (158). This registration does not include school cooperatives; this way, data differ from the previously presented total (269).

⁷ Ignacio Zaragoza was characterized by its commitment to the community. Among its relevant activities noticeable are the creation of a theater-hall for social events, and the support for *Casa del Migrante*, *Centro de Rehabilitación y Asistencia para Enfermos Mentales*, and retirement houses for the elderly. The mutualist society lived for 110 years. In May 2017, the partners decided to close it down because they did not have the health conditions to carry on working, as they were older than 70 years (Aguilar, 2017).

⁸ We refer to female workers because, historically, women’s work has taken place largely in maquiladoras.

selectors⁹ in the creation of *Sociedad Cooperativa de Seleccionadores de Materiales*, Socosema, being legally established on May 16th, 1975.

By the late seventies and early eighties, COMO taught cooperative education courses and offered technical assistance to more than 50 production and consumption cooperatives in Ciudad Juárez, engaged in activities as diverse as construction material suppliers, woolen blankets for horses, ice, wooden moldings. They even actively participated in courses by *Comité Coordinador de Cooperativas de Ciudad Juárez* [Coordination Committee of Cooperatives in Ciudad Juárez]. Out of such cooperatives, there is only the legal records of five of them, three are engaged in production and two in consumption, they have 517 partners in total.

In the 1980s, local newspapers refer the existence of a number of cooperatives: *Cooperativa Confecciones Mexicana* [Mexican Confections Cooperative]; a coring firm that belonged to a cooperative of farmers; cooperative society of *Transportes Ciudadinos y del Campo* [City and Countryside Transports], affiliated to *Confederación Nacional Campesina* [National Farming Confederation]; a brick maker cooperative; *Sociedad Cooperativa de Consumo y Bienestar Social de Juárez* [Cooperative Society of Consumption and Social Welfare of Juárez]; and *Sociedad Mutualista de Comerciantes Fronterizos* [Mutualist Society of Border Traders]. However, over this term, records only documented the legal constitution of two cooperatives, which accounted for 41 partners. This exiguous participation started to change as of the 1990s, over this period, there is a legal record of eight cooperatives: one that produced goods, other four engaged in offering services, and three, consumption; totaling 166 associates.

By the turn of the new millennia, with the consolidation of the EMI in the city, the consolidation of cooperatives increased. Between 2000 and 2010, 85 cooperatives were created, which as a whole gathered 609 individuals, with an accumulated social contribution of slightly more than nine million MXN (see table 3). Differencing between the production of goods and services, there are 17 cooperatives producing goods and have 128 partners, while 60 produce services and have 437 associates.

Only in the 143 cooperatives created over the last two decades, the social contribution of the cooperative partners of the cooperative society reached slightly more than 17.5 million MXN.¹⁰ The cooperative with the most contributions (seven million MXN) is in tourism in Salamayuca dunes, a rural population part of Juárez municipality; it is followed by a cooperative with a contribution of five millions, and another of one million; both with profiles close to maquila, as they are engaged in machining and industrial products. By contrast, cooperatives engaged in social development, art, and even some in consumption, were created with social contributions under 1 000 MXN; nevertheless, the average contribution for all cooperatives is 123 444 MXN. An overview analysis of the activities of CS by sector (see table 4) shows that most of the cooperatives is engaged in commercial activities and offers professional services, which contrast

⁹ On whom approximately depended 1 125 people: 682 women and 443 children.

¹⁰ The exact social contribution is 17 652 554 MXN. Only the last two decades are presented due to the time frame of this work, for we are interested in analyzing the current cooperative movement, linked to the difficulty of comparing equivalences between the social contributions before the devaluation of Mexican peso in 1993.

with the existence of other cooperatives, which in spite of not being quantitatively representative, are interesting because of the diversity of activities and services they offer such as medical industry, financial services, tourism and recreation.

Table 3. Cooperative societies in Ciudad Juárez 2000-2010

Sort of cooperative	Number	Partners	Social contribution (in MXN)
Production	77	565	8 928 450
Consumption	7	39	88 000
Savings and loans	1	5	100 000
Total	85	609	9 116 450

Source: Own elaboration based on data from *Registro Público de Comercio* (Secretaría de Economía, 2020).

Table 4. Cooperatives by sector 2000-2020

Activity by sectors	Cooperatives	Percentage
Trade	40	28
Professional services	24	16.8
Agriculture and livestock rearing	15	10.5
Urban wastes	13	9.1
Art, social development and education	11	7.7
Transport	11	7.7
Industry	9	6.3
Construction and housing	7	4.9
Other	13	9.1
Total	143	100

Source: Own elaboration based on data from *Registro Público de Comercio* (Secretaría de Economía, 2020).

In comparison with the previous decade, between 2011 and 2020, the listing of legally constituted cooperatives decreased. Over this period, 58 cooperatives were created, which gathered 396 people, with a social contribution of slightly more than eight and a half million MXN (see Table 5). Once again, breaking down the activities of production of goods and

services, it is noticed that only 14 CS are engaged in production of goods, with a general affiliation of 123 partners and a joint social contribution of 267 000 MXN; while 40 cooperatives are engaged in services, with 241 partners and a total social contribution of 8 259 104 MXN.

Table 5. Cooperatives in Ciudad Juárez 2011-2020

Sort of activity	Cooperative	Partners	Social contribution (MXN)
Production	54	364	8 526 104
Consumption	4	32	10 000
Savings and loans	0	0	0
Total	58	396	8 536 104

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Registro Público de Comercio (Secretaría de Economía, 2020).

As previously mentioned, the existence of cooperative societies does not determine the existence of the cooperativism movement; in this way, the participation of agencies of cooperative integration is necessary to group the organizations, to put forward and set into motion self-managerial and democratic actions with a view to improving in an integral manner their partners' conditions of life by means of collective actions sustained over time; otherwise, the creation of cooperative firms would follow a capitalist logic.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that in 2009, *Unión de Cooperativas de Actividades Diversas del Estado de Chihuahua*, UCADECH [Union of Cooperatives of Diversified Activities of the State of Chihuahua], was created in Ciudad Juárez with the participation of *Grupo Acude*, *MMIBE Manucoop*, *Solache Financiera*, *Grupo Mascota*, and *Alianza Global*. UCADECH is a member of *Confederación Nacional Cooperativa de Actividades Diversas de la República Mexicana* [National Cooperative Confederation of Diversified Activities of the Mexican Republic], which grouped 23 cooperative societies of 15 Mexican states. It has participated in events such as *Foro Binacional de Economía Solidaria México-Estados Unidos*¹¹ [Mexico-U.S. Binational Forum of Solidarity Economy] and in *Foro Regional Noroeste de Cooperativismo para el Desarrollo Sustentable del Estado de Chihuahua* [Northwest Regional Forum on Cooperativism for Sustainable Development in the State of Chihuahua].¹² In December 2011, UCADECH presented in the State Congress the bill proposal for Cooperative Promotion in the State of Chihuahua. However, the proposal was not approved, in spite of the joint effort of state authorities and some cooperative societies, as it was in the context of the international year of

¹¹ Held on November 10th and 11th of November 2010 in *Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez*, for the purpose of developing Mexico-U.S. relationships in the sphere of SSE.

¹² On February 2012.

cooperatives.¹³ In this regard, the advisory coordination of the parliamentary PRI fraction argued that the bill lost any social intention as it created inequality and even disadvantages for organizations not constituted as cooperative societies (H. Congreso del Estado de Chihuahua, 2012).

Though neither do integration agencies on their own ensure the existence of a cooperativist movement, in the case of Ciudad Juárez, it is paradoxical that UCADECH in addition to reasserting the cooperativism movement, referred entrepreneurial alliances in its discourse, presenting cooperativism as a fiscal strategy for entrepreneurs and advocating for entrepreneurial cooperativism as the new development model for Mexico (Alvarez Rubio, 2020). Over the last decade, no collective actions have been carried out to publicly show cooperative identity and unity, or else, alternatives for social improvements, beyond their requests for a legislation proper and suitable for the state of Chihuahua.

As regards the search for an integral improvement of the partners' conditions of life, the cooperatives show that in most of them, the partners are unaware of the vision of cooperativism, its values and principles. The pioneers of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez were family associations mainly comprised of traders and maquila workers, which were service providers and also material recyclers, among which distinguishable were urban and industrial wastes. Over the last decade, the services offered by cooperative partners and their activity profiles broadened, for as noticed between 2010 and 2020, the creation of cooperative societies by professionals who offer administrative, accounting, and legal services was noticeable. However, they are entrepreneurial societies oriented to the maquila industry. Cooperatives created by the economic elites of the cities are outstanding as well, which adding to the cooperative partners' vision, indicates that over the last century, the legal concept of CS has been increasingly resorted to for purposes, practices, and values other than those of cooperativism. It is clear that certain local economic sectors and groups resort to this concept because of the fiscal and administrative advantages this form of association has as a strategy for lucrative private firms to reduce costs. In this sense, a cooperativist partner and accountant states that "cooperatives have no idea of cooperativism, the boom of cooperativism is because entrepreneurs search for a legal figure that doesn't make paying taxes much of a problem" (personal communication, February 10th, 2021).

The approach to cooperativism shows two features. In the first place, cooperative societies created before the year 2000, to a good extent supported by organizations such as *Centro de Orientación de la Mujer Obrera*, are still operating. However, most of them do not work as a cooperative anymore, as they do not abide by cooperativism principles neither is collectively owned nor decisions democratically made. Secondly, most of the cooperative societies created between 2001 and 2020 have two characteristics of their own. They may be the product of familial initiatives, as their partners are part of the same family, nevertheless, after constituting as a CS they do not manage to start their activities, or else, they last a short time operating, between one and two years, on average. Or they may continue working and were created by partners that share professional activities, for example, engineers, accountants, or lawyers. Moreover, there are

¹³ To date, the state of Chihuahua does not have a special law for the promotion of SSE.

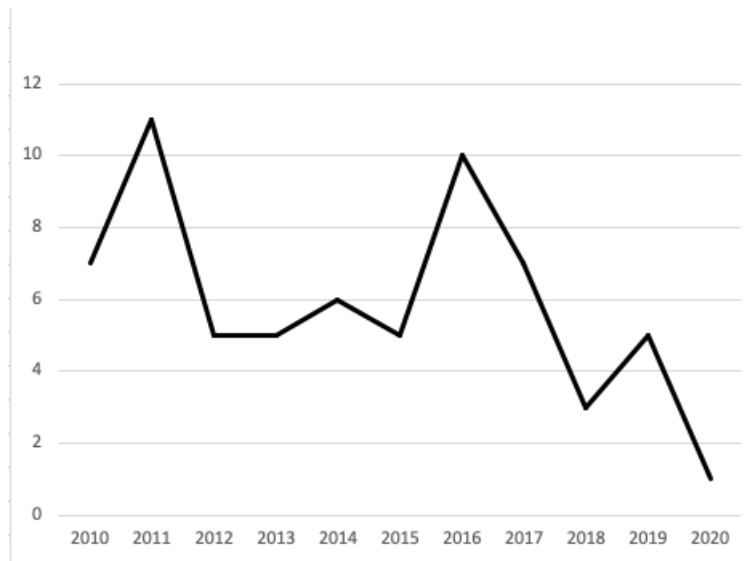
private firms that manage to endure in their activities, but with employees who ignore the principles of cooperativism: even some are maquiladoras in industrial parks in the city, which verifies the argumentation that they constitute as a fiscal strategy.

Cooperative partners that fostered or participated in CS during the last decade start from an entrepreneurial vision supported on an entrepreneurial approach, with technical, financial and legal knowledge about cooperativism, but with no greater identification with its practices, principles and values. The respondents point out that “people have created cooperatives basically as a fiscal strategy, not because of a vision of cooperativism or solidarity economy. It’s been an experience I’ve seen in other cooperatives, which I’ve heard of and specifically, one in which I was” (personal communication, February 13th, 2021). Even if the cooperatives in which the respondents participated were free to join and leave, the associates’ economic contribution became so problematic that prevented the participation of some as they did not manage to afford such contribution. This occurred to a cooperative partner, who stated she left the cooperative “because she was not able to afford the contributions to start” (personal communication, November 29th, 2020). Due to the prevalence of an individualist culture and the lack of clarity in the cooperative’s ultimate goal, the participation of all the partners was not possible because the dynamic of hierarchies and control of processes generated division and even the withdrawal of cooperative partners; however, neither were cooperative education nor the training of partners pursued.

As regards the earliest cooperatives, the partners of CS created over the last decade expressed there have not been equality conditions, but depending on the social contribution, the partners are considered owners of the society, even hiring employees to execute the firms’ projects. They add that the principle of equity is not practiced either, for most of the partners are men, and women have a poor representation or are usually accompanied by their husbands and children, and are not considered in decision making. In this sense, a cooperative partner tells her experience in the council meetings: “it was difficult for me among just men to speak my mind, I always thought I wasn’t validated because I was younger and with the least experience” (personal communication, November 29th, 2020).

The entrepreneurial culture, ignoring the principles and values of cooperativism and the critical circumstances of the city as regards extreme violence, exploitation and poverty, generate conditions that make the growth and strengthening of cooperativism pressing, but hinder it at once. This is noticed in the number of cooperative societies that have been created over the last decade, whose average is 5.9 annual CS. The year with the most CS registrations was 2011, with 11; that same year, UCADECH presented the proposal bill for Cooperative Support for the State of Chihuahua. Between 2012 and 2015, the annual average was around six, to increase in 2016, when this figure reached the 2011 level, with 10. As of 2017, the number of cooperatives noticeably decreased, up to 2020, to reach one CS (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Cooperatives created in Ciudad Juárez (2010-2020)



Source: Own elaboration based on data from *Registro Público de Comercio* (Secretaría de Economía, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the existence of a record of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez for slightly more than a century, the topic has not been in the interest of scholars of social sciences in the region. In point of fact, few are the research works that deal with it. With the exception of Socosema, there is no hard evidence of other theoretical approaches or empirical queries on this topic. This omission, disinterest or neglect explain that this associative segment has remained invisible and that very little is known about their performance, practices, values and potentialities. Hence, by and large, we noticed a lack of studies on cooperative experiences that approach their social contributions, the needs they respond to, as well as the challenges they face. From here the relevance of this first approach, oriented to the analysis of the outlines of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez, to discover its main features, clarify their organizational projects, and to glimpse their potential to become an alternative for the capitalist system from the standpoint of SSE.

Over the years, cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez became, from the resistance of laborers' movements, mainly in EMI, a legal concept used by entrepreneurs as a managerial and fiscal strategy, tax avoidance and even accessing governmental supports to foster cooperativism. Along this time, there were multiple experiences of cooperative societies that did not manage to set their solidarity projects and ideas into motion beyond their legal constitution. This contrasts with the projects of entrepreneurial nature that have remained in operation and which have been experiences of prosperous economic management, but without abiding by cooperative principles and values.

Sketching the outlines of cooperativism, from its origins to present day, demonstrate that during the sixties there were conditions of injustice that boosted the search for alternatives, so

they planted the seeds of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez. The triggering event was the increment of the population that lived in poverty and pauperization. Linked to the above, it starts with the mass dismissal of employees, which produced discontent among laborers and people engaged in other trades such as transporters, extractive activity workers, and material selectors, among others. Between the late eighties and up to the mid-nineties, cooperativism entered into a growing phase, as a mass number of people moved to create cooperative societies and even collaborate with one another to reach their goals. However, by the mid-nineties, there was a contraction phase because the Mexican state started applying neoliberal policies and the coming into force of NAFTA. Noticeable was the decrease in the participation of cooperative societies, from that moment up to the present, which contrasts with the formal registration of firms.

The periodization we carried out allows noticing that over the 1960's and 70's, cooperatives were a sort of resistance of workers and marginalized populations in Ciudad Juárez. Albeit, with the irruption of neoliberalism in 1990's, the local cooperative regime experienced a radical transformation and somewhat drifted away from its origins and the earliest years, when it started to become a social movement that intended to transform economic relationships, meet its partners' most pressing needs from strong rooting in the community and clear social and environmental responsibility supported on cooperative values and principles. Well now, it may be said that cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez is far from such practices, values, and goals; the critical vision of the current economic model has disappeared, while the goal of attaining the best and most profitable insertion in this model is ever present. It is true, there are cases of cooperative societies such as those linked to groups of workers, in which the cooperative state of mind persists as an alternative for self-employment in the face of the offer from maquiladora industry. However, associative cases that have decided to follow a path to become private enterprises, leaving cooperative principles and values aside, and with the purpose of offering some kind of service mainly to maquila industry have proliferated; this segment has become noticeable in recent years, they are pseudo-cooperatives in the sense of Díaz Muñoz (2015). Juridically, these are formal expressions of social economy, though their contents and orientation have nothing to do with the management, procedures, norms, and solidarity ideas, and neither do they have a public presence intended to set up and improve social services.

It is important to differentiate between the legal figure and practices because the experience of cooperative societies has demonstrated that organizations have legal and administrative capabilities, but no broader formative processes that help expand the culture of cooperativism have been established. Owing to this, there are divergences and contradictions between the ideals of cooperativism and practices of cooperative societies in Ciudad Juárez, for in spite of the existence of legally constituted cooperatives, no collective actions sustained over time are carried out to demonstrate that cooperatives keep solidarity relationships and common interests.

The practices lack content, the forms are used though they move away from the social end; this way, it is worth wondering if we face the appropriation of old forms of struggle, or a weakened social movement. Although it would seem that the panoramic analysis of the outlines of cooperativism shows a discouraging situation, "it is necessary to pay attention to the positive aspects of people, communities and organizations; to initiatives that create the new, works and

realizations that seem to be bearers of positive values, as small as they be; to ideas that indicate and prefigure emerging forms and contents” (Razeto Migliaro, 2013). In this sense, the starting points have to be strengths, error correction and the search for other forms that are far from the classic and legally constituted forms, but are innovative and may be part of the SSE movement.

It is considered that cooperative societies in Ciudad Juárez have the potential to contest capitalism and the entrepreneurial elite. To do so, it is necessary to foster education projects that enable the partners to identify that the social objective is not only the economic activity, but the social end.

For cooperative societies to integrate into the cooperative and SSE movements, they have to search for a good life for their partners from meeting the needs of their communities, either food, health care, housing, transport, education, and care, among others, and at once, strengthen the identity of the community by means of the integral development of projects where the center is the reproduction of life, not the reproduction of capital (Valadez, Mance, & Rivera de la Rosa, 2019).

It is necessary to review the juridical situation of private enterprises that have become cooperative societies. Either they changed their moral compass or made their practices follow cooperative principles and values. In addition to visualizing the practices of cooperativism in Ciudad Juárez, it is necessary that cooperative partners share the vision of the movement, identify as members of organizations that carry the seed of the transformation of the current economic, political, social, and cultural conditions. This will enable CS to overcome the ceaseless search for insertion into the dominant economic system and prioritize the creation of solidarity collaboration networks among organizations.

In the meantime, in the academy, various research lines have been opened to locate the existence of other economic practices that look for a good life, supported on SSE principles such as those cooperatives not legally constituted, collectives, social and solidarity ventures, the practices of diverse communities, collaboration networks, and even virtual spaces. Hence, following the proposal of Movement Netlab, a new hypothesis is put forward for new research works. As observed, after a contraction comes an evolution period in which it is necessary to deepen into the success factors and the failures to correct the way of the cooperativist movement, shorten contraction periods and enter strengthened into the evolution and new normal phase. However, all of this will not be carried out only from academy, but as a part of a political agenda of the actors of cooperativism, integration agencies and institutions that assists the cooperative movement. As a research line, at least for the local case, we restate the proposal by scholars such as Díaz Muñoz (2015), who considers that solidarity economy is still just a sprout, an embryo. Presently, in Ciudad Juárez, the movement of social and solidarity economy is in the evolution and new normal phase. Even if the cooperativism contracts, this creates new organizations from the diversity of actors and projects that are reflecting on and trying other forms and possibilities to build another economy beyond cooperativism.

Translation: Luis Cejudo-Espinosa.

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