

TRANSCENDENCE OF COOPERATIVES IN SUSTAINABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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Abstract

The main reference of the Social Economy (SE) is the cooperative enterprise. In the Basque Country (BC), cooperatives have always represented a significant percentage of SE entities. In addition, the BC is among the highest-ranked territories in the world in terms of industrial entrepreneurial development in SE. Traditionally, Basque cooperatives have been concerned with meeting the needs of their members and with their active participation, taking into account the community around them. The values and principles governing these companies have been the economic driving force of the BC even in times of economic crisis. These values and principles are key instruments for working together to achieve the purposes of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Proof of this are the cooperative principles that, for more than half a century have guided Mondragon Corporation Cooperative (MCC), a world benchmark of the Basque Cooperative Movement (BCM). This research aims to analyse the features of the BCM and its impact on the sustainable socio-economic development in the BC from the perspective of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN2030 Agenda).

1. Introduction

A cooperative is a legal form of enterprise characterised by its social and personal values and principles. Unlike other legal forms, cooperatives are not solely driven by profit maximisation; and, whilst it is true that, as with any enterprise operating according to the rules of a capitalist society, cooperatives' viability is necessary to guarantee their survival, they also satisfy other social and personal aims.

According to Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations in 2012, 'Co-operatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both economic viability and social responsibility' (International Co-operative Alliance [ICA], 2012). The ICA General Assembly in Kigali in 2019 approved its new strategic plan called 'A People Centred Path for a Second Cooperative Decade 2020–2030', which recognised that 'the cooperative model is a concrete and fully tested way of meeting people's economic, social and cultural needs through democratic empowerment. Although an estimated 12 percent of

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the world population are members of a cooperative, most are not aware of the power and potential of the cooperative movement, nor how it could transform their lives. Each of us in the international cooperative movement has a serious responsibility and a role in making the cooperative model work in the interest of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of humanity and our common planet.’

For its part, the ICA at its centenary congress (Manchester 1995), with the declaration on cooperatives in the 21st century and the (ICA) Statement on the Cooperative Identity, established the definition of the cooperative society, its values, and principles. In this Statement, the ICA established that these societies ‘share internationally agreed principles and act together to build a better world through cooperation’. This is precisely what UN2030 Agenda is currently asking of any kind of public or private entity.

Later, in the UN General Assembly, Transforming Our World: UN2030 Agenda,³ 17 challenging goals were laid out. In the International Symposium on Cooperatives and the Sustainable Development Goals: Focus on Africa (Berlin 2014), a joint initiative of the ICA and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the relevance of cooperatives for economic, social, and environmental sustainability was recognised. Simel Esim, Manager of the ILO's Cooperative Branch, stated that at the ILO the ‘values and principles governing cooperative enterprises respond to the pressing issues of economic development, environmental protection and social equity in a globalized world’.

This international reality is even more evident in the BC. As stated in the ‘2º Informe de Seguimiento I. Agenda Euskadi Basque Country 2030’, the Basque SE is a world benchmark in worker cooperativism.⁴ At the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held in Brussels in 2018, data on worker cooperatives in the BC were presented. Cooperative societies represented 66% of the sector, while in Europe the percentage was 19%. The volume of BCM employment is 59% and 26% in Europe. In addition, the transforming potential of the SE and its contribution to the construction of a sustainable, integrated, and cohesive Europe was also recalled.⁵

This research aims to analyse the features of the BCM and its impact on the sustainable socio-economic development of the BC from the perspective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN2030 Agenda). To achieve this goal, we first introduce and justify the relevance of the topic at hand. Then, in the second section, we document the importance of the BCM in the economy of the region and its influence on the national economy. In the third section, we look at the economic viability that cooperatives must achieve in order to survive, before considering their greater resilience in times of crisis. Then, in the fourth section, we justify the decisive role played by cooperatives in the achievement

³ UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1, UN General Assembly: Geneva, Switzerland, 2015.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.euskadi.eus/agenda-2030/seguimiento-2018/>

⁵ In April 2018, Social Economy Europe, in collaboration with the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy, organised at the EESC a roundtable on regional policies for the SE in Europe, under the title ‘A new generation of public policies for the Social Economy’. Representatives of the European Parliament Intergroup and the European Commission's Working Group on SE attended the event. The then Director of SE of the Basque Government, Jokin Diaz, highlighted the importance of the SE in the BC as a world reference.

of the SDGs, illustrating the case of BCM with the contributions made by the MCC and four other cooperatives not directly linked to this corporation. Finally, we draw a conclusion to the study.

2. Cooperative enterprises in the BC

In this section, we outline the birth and evolution of the BCM, showing the transcendence of this type of entity in the Basque Economy (BE). The literature identifies the BCM with its ancestral traditions, especially with the way it organises work in primitive communities. The cooperative values and principles, including those laid out by the ICA in its Statement on the Cooperative Identity, were already present in these communities. Among others, voluntary and open association, economic participation of members, cooperation between cooperatives, and the feeling of community, have been identified in different communal organisations and workers' self-management of Basque peoples.

The historian OLABARRI GORTAZAR (1985), always closely linked to the Basque world and focused until the late 1980s on labour relations and BCM, saw realities such as the organised use of communal land, fishermen' unions, and neighbourhood unions as true expressions of the cooperative and community spirit. Following his work, several authors locate the origin of the BCM in the so-called 'auzolana', which refers to voluntary work done for the benefit of the local community. Other factors such as industrial culture, political tradition, religion (especially in credit cooperatives), and the unique characteristics of Basque society are also considered to have had an influence. The first consumer cooperatives were established in the BC at the end of 1800 and the first Basque industrial cooperative was founded in 1892. This type of cooperative transformed the entire environment in which they were located and created a legitimately cooperative world around them (DE LA FUENTE COSGAYA, 2020, p. 136). The same author takes up the categorisation of 'late, dynamic, versatile and multifaceted' cooperativism offered by ALTUNA GABILONDO (2008, p. 91), but qualifies that 'because of the Franco dictatorship, there has never again been a workers' cooperativism like that one. Its social function was not only to generate employment but also to provide surpluses to the workers' organisations of the time' (*id.*, p. 137).

The Mondragon Cooperative Experience, a leader in the BCM has followed this model. The new cooperative movement distanced itself from political ideals, with the intellectual capital and values of its founder, José María Arizmendiarieta, guiding it towards principles such as religion, training, community orientation in rural work transferred to the industrial scope, and Basque identity. Its first initiatives were developed in the educational, industrial, and financial areas. In 1943, Arizmendiarieta founded the Professional School, which has become today's University of Mondragon. In terms of industry and production, Arizmendiarieta, three of the seven heads of factories in Union Cerrajera (Luis Usatorre, Alfonso Gorroñoigoitia, and José María Ormaechea), and two former students of the Professional School (Jesús Larrañaga and Javier Ortubay) purchased, in 1955, a company that manufactured gasoline burners in Vitoria. They called it Ulgor, using the initials of their surnames, and created the first cooperative of its kind. A year later, they moved the

cooperative to Mondragon where it was later known as Fagor Electrodomesticos. In 1958, a system of social provision was created in response to the order of the Ministry of Labour that excludes members belonging to cooperatives from the General Social Security System, while the foundation of a credit cooperative, Caja Laboral Popular, enabled access to financing for cooperatives.

The historical context at that time was one of the most traumatic in the modern history of Spain and BC. Authors such as ALTUNA and URTEAGA (2018, p. 141) as well as ORTEGA and URIARTE (2015, p. 4) note that it was in this time of extreme poverty and social division that the BCM was conceived. They believe that its purpose was to cover the emerging needs of post-war society. In the same vein, BARANDIARAN and LEZAUN (2017, p. 280) describe 1940's Spain as 'a country traumatized by the sequels of a terrible civil war, living in poverty under a harsh dictatorship, and forcibly isolated from the rest of the world. Political associations and trade unions were banned (except for the state-sanctioned "vertical syndicate"), and civil society was subjected to extensive police surveillance. In the Basque Provinces, General Franco's regime adopted an even more coercive profile, with an active policy of repression against any expression of Basque identity and autonomous social organization.' This situation particularly affected the social and entrepreneurial movement that Arizmendiarieta had started. As MOLINA and MIGUEZ (2008, p. 291) explain, 'Arizmendiarieta's pastoral work fell into the political category of dissent from the dictatorship. This dissent was not founded on cultural or social resistance of a Marxist or Basque nationalist nature, but rather on a deconstruction of the political culture of General Franco's military dictatorship, of its ideological myths and principles. It was also a confrontation with Franco's mobilizing institutions, such as the single party (Falange) and Catholic Action itself, which was criticized for its politicization. Arizmendiarieta was proposing a civic project built on a sort of catholic values, with values such as equality, freedom, fraternity and reconciliation, which were contrary to the official values. He used a communication strategy that bordered on the illegal: local public opinion.'

Despite these challenges, the BCM continued to make progress and, in 1964, the Ularco industrial group was formed, bringing together different industrial cooperatives created under the umbrella of the Mondragon Cooperative Experience. From then onwards all co-operatives 'had statutes inspired by Ulgor, with three guiding principles: work, savings, and democracy. An increasing sense of efficiency and productivity in each day's work was seen as a means of encouraging workers to save as much as possible in order to capitalize and reinvest in the company. This in turn led to the creation of new jobs and the rise of other co-operatives and institutions dedicated to social welfare in the local community under a social-Catholic morality' (MOLINA and MIGUEZ, 2008, p. 297).

However, it was not until 1987 that the first BC Cooperative Congress agreed on the basic principles of Mondragon Cooperative Experience.⁶ These principles 'assume and bring

⁶ ORMAETXEA, J. M. (1994), in BARANDIARAN and LEZAUN (2017, p. 281 and 282): ten 'basic principles' guiding the Mondragon Cooperative Experience: (1) Free Membership (Libre Adhesión): there are no barriers to the membership for those who want to be part of the Mondragón experience, provided they respect its basic principles. (2) Democratic organisation: equality of worker-members (socios cooperativistas) expressed in the election of the

together in their proclamation the Universal Co-operative Principles updated by the International Cooperative Alliance, the experience accumulated during the 50 years of co-operative history and the open and dynamic nature of these Principles, subject to the evolution of objective circumstances and to the enriching contributions of the co-operators of the future' (ELIO, 2004, p. 346). In the aforementioned cooperative values and principles updated by the ICA, we can see that the cooperative principles that gave rise to the birth and consolidation of the BCM are still present in our cooperative entities, thus maintaining their social commitment.⁷

The BC Cooperatives Law,⁸ in its explanatory memorandum, highlights the value of cooperatives within the SE, arguing that 'the social economy, understood under the dictates of Law 5/2011, of 29 March, on Social Economy and the pronouncements of the various institutions of the European Union – both Parliament and Council, Commission and Economic and Social Council – encompasses companies and entities that are defined or in which a series of principles and values concur that are rooted in the historical principles of cooperativism.'

Like numerous other authors, we can affirm that the BMC is one of the main generators of wealth and employment in the economy of BC. Both the literature and existing data support the fact that this type of SE represents an important economic engine in our society. The

cooperative's representative bodies (one socio, one vote). (3) Sovereignty of labour: labour (trabajo) is the transformative factor in society and human beings and is, therefore, the basis for the distribution of wealth. (4) The instrumental and subordinated character of capital: capital is an instrument and should be subordinated to labour. (5) Self-management: worker-members should be provided with opportunities and mechanisms to participate in the management of the firm. (6) Pay solidarity: a fair and equitable return for labour. (7) Inter-cooperation: a commitment to cooperation among different cooperative firms. (8) Social transformation: a commitment to transform society by pursuing a future of liberty, justice, and solidarity. (9) Universalism: the Mondragón experience is part of the broader search for peace, justice, and development of the international cooperative movement. (10) Education: a commitment to dedicate the necessary human and economic resources to cooperative education.

⁷ See International Cooperative Alliance website, www.ica.coop. Cooperative values: Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. Cooperative Principles: The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice: (1) Voluntary and Open: Membership Cooperatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination. (2) Democratic Member Control: Cooperatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organised democratically. (3) Member Economic Participation Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; supporting other activities approved by the membership. (4) Autonomy and Independence: Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy. (5) Education, Training, and Information: Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of co-operation. (6) Cooperation among Cooperatives: Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures. (7) Concern for Community Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

⁸ Ley 11/2019, de 20 de diciembre, de Cooperativas de Euskadi publicada en el Boletín Oficial del País Vasco N° 247 del 30 de diciembre de 2019

latest Basque SE report, corresponding to the 2016–2018 biennium, included the data summarised in Table 1. The first column contains the most significant data on the so-called Classic Forms of the Social Economy (CFSE), which includes cooperative societies, limited labour companies, and public limited labour companies. The second column shows the contribution of cooperatives to the total results of the CFSE.⁹

Table 1. Contributions of the CFSE to the Basque economy

CFSE TOTAL	COOPERATIVES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery of 75% of the jobs destroyed since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008 (recovery of 52% in the Basque labour market as a whole). • 60,609 jobs, increasing the relative weight of the Basque employed population (6.5%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53,390 jobs. More than 88% of Basque SE employment. • Increase of 3,507 jobs. The 98% of net employment generated in the Basque SE. • Cooperative employment growth of 7% (1.2% rest of Basque SE).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basque SE turnover close to €8.5 billion. • Profits of €416 million (pre-crisis levels) • Growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) > €3 billion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 91% of Basque SE turnover • 87% of total Basque SE profit • 90% of GVA generated on the Basque SE

Source: Own elaboration based on the report ‘Social Economy Statistics 2018 and Advance 2019’ by the Basque Government Department of Employment and Justice

At the national level, we can also cite data that reflect the importance of cooperativism in general and BCM in particular. The report *‘Análisis del impacto socioeconómico de los valores y principios de la Economía Social en España (Confederación Empresarial Española de la Economía Social [CEPES], 2020)’* highlights the significant weight of the SE in Spanish private business companies, where six out of every 100 organisations belong to the SE. It identifies significant differences by regions and explains that in the case of the BC (where it represents 7.6% of the productive fabric) *‘for historical, cultural and institutional reasons, the development of the social economy has been more deeply rooted’*.¹⁰

According to the information provided by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security, the cooperatives in the BC had an average size of 36.9 workers per cooperative in 2018, topping the national ranking, whose average was 16.2. The BC is also the fourth region in terms of the number of cooperative enterprises and is the leading community at national

⁹ Available at: <https://www.euskadi.eus/gobierno-vasco/-/documentacion/2018/informe-de-la-estadistica-de-la-economia-social-vasca-2018/>

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.cep.es/publicaciones>

level if we measure its weight concerning the number of workers employed in CFSE, with an increase of 6.7%, compared to the national average of 3.6%.¹¹

3. Viability of cooperative enterprises

For cooperatives to add value to a society, it is essential they themselves survive economically in that society. The market will not allow them to survive simply because they are carrying out socio-economic development work. Like all other agents, they are required to be viable, as without viability it is impossible for them to sustain themselves and thus improve the surrounding economic environment. In this section, therefore, we analyse how, in the case of cooperatives, fulfilling basic principles and values does not impede their survival. This last aspect will be analysed in greater depth in section 4.

As we noted in the introduction, cooperatives are characterised by their social and personal values and principles, relegating profit maximisation to second place on their list of priorities. Proof of this is the definition of this type of company approved by the ICA (Manchester 1995): ‘a cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.’¹² However, the survival of any business depends on its viability and, ‘of course, as with any other type of business, if a cooperative is being badly managed or has serious weaknesses in its business strategy, a recession will find this out and it may fail’ (BIRCHALL and KETILSON, 2009, p. 9). Referring to the BCM, ALTUNA GABILONDO (2008, p. 72) recalls that ‘Arizmendiarieta always stressed the importance of the economic variable: the cooperative experience had to prove its viability. What was at stake was to demonstrate the coming of age of the working class, as well as its maturity for self-government and self-organisation. Economic efficiency and effectiveness in business management were decisive challenges.’

Experience has shown the effective viability of cooperatives even in times of crisis. Many international studies, sometimes related to BCM, report specific cases in which cooperative entrepreneurship has been a success or situations in which the idiosyncrasies of cooperatives have enabled them to overcome crises more easily. In the study of International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC-International), ‘Recent Evolutions in the Social Economy in the European Union’, Alain Coheur (Co-Spokesperson of the SE Category [EESC]) emphasised that ‘the social economy's potential for growth at a time of economic and social crisis has been highlighted on many occasions. Indeed, the social economy is a model of resilience, and continues to develop while other economic sectors are struggling’ (MONZÓN and CHAVES AVILA, 2017, p. 4).

¹¹ Available at: <https://www.cesegab.com/es-es/Publicaciones/Memoria-Socioecon%C3%B3mica>

¹² Available at: <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

BIRCHALL and KETILSON (2009, pp. 5–7) reflect upon the history of cooperatives, showing clear examples in which cooperative enterprises have been more resilient in the face of crises. They highlight multiple cases in which the cooperative movement has contributed to meeting the needs of the societies hardest hit by crises and, at the same time, how, once cooperatives have been established, they have served as an example of resilience in times of crisis.

They claim, ‘Cooperatives can lessen the impact of the recession by the mere fact that they survive and continue to carry out business. There is evidence that cooperatives in all sectors survive better than their competitors.’ They explain this phenomenon by looking at the existence of general comparative advantages to cooperatives derived from the nature of cooperatives as member-owned businesses and particular comparative advantages to cooperatives derived from specific types of cooperatives. Focusing on the general advantages, which are derived from membership, the authors explain that ‘cooperatives are uniquely member-owned, member-controlled and exist to provide benefits to members as opposed to profit and this has an impact on business decisions. When the purposes of the business are aligned with those of members who are both investors and consumers of the cooperative, the results are loyalty, commitment, shared knowledge, member participation, underpinned by strong economic incentives’ (*id.*, p. 12–13).

The article focuses on the banking crisis and reminds us that the cooperative model is not a ‘magic formula for success. However, it is interesting to see just how strongly cooperative banks, savings and credit cooperatives and credit unions are performing during the current banking crisis, and how little help they have needed from governments, in contrast to their investor-owned competitors who have had to be bailed out with staggeringly large amounts of public funding’ (*id.*, p. 9).

ARANA LANDIN (2010, p. 86) argues that the above-mentioned study sufficiently proves the greater resilience of cooperatives compared to other legal forms, thus demonstrating the solid foundations on which cooperatives are built.

MARTÍNEZ CHARTERINA (2015, p. 31), meanwhile, recognises that ‘the crisis affects these social economy organisations just like other companies,’ but explains that ‘as they are companies whose organisational model includes values that condition the way they operate, which follows certain operating principles [...], they respond to the crisis with greater degrees of resilience and flexibility than conventional companies.’

In the case of BC, according to data published by the Basque Government (Department of Employment and Justice), the Basque SE has responded better to the crisis than the general economy of the regions. In cooperatives, the loss of employment has been lower and, as we have seen in the previous section, by the end of 2018 it had recovered a high percentage of the jobs lost since the start of the financial crisis.

4. The cooperative movement and sustainability

In the previous section, we discussed the necessity and reality of the viability of cooperatives. The special feature of these enterprises is that they are viable without the need to damage the sustainability of the economy and society. In other words, they are viable and sustainable because their basic principles respect the sustainable development of the planet. In the words of ARANA LANDIN (2010, p. 86), cooperatives are guided by ethical values and in ‘the performance of ethical intelligence they contribute to sustainable development’. Indeed, according to the seventh cooperative principle approved by the ICA, the respect for the sustainable development of their communities is one of the guidelines by which cooperatives must put their values into practice.

The International Cooperation and Development, European Commission (2018, p. 16) recognised that cooperatives ‘have become instrumental partners in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised people. The promotion and defence of a space where these development actors can operate safely is critical for achieving sustainable development.’

The ILO, as it proclaims on its website,¹³ promotes the cooperative business model to create and maintain sustainable enterprises, offering jobs that not only provide income but also pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, empowering individuals, their families, and communities. The ILO’s work in cooperative development is based on the firm conviction that the promotion of the social and solidarity economy (SSE), which consists of cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations, and social enterprises, is an effective way to promote social justice and social inclusion for all members of society.

Furthermore, we cannot forget that cooperatives are the main agent of the SS and that their important contributions to sustainability are already documented. According to the information on the CEPES website, SE enterprises and organisations are seriously committed to the UN2030 Agenda, seeking to build a better future for generations to come, generate economic growth compatible with the health of the planet, ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth, and offer better life opportunities to all people. The benefit of the SE can be seen in the link between its development cooperation interventions and the SDGs. Specifically, it contributes to achieving 16 SDGs and 63 of the 169 goals of the UN2030 Agenda.

According to the Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe. Comparative synthesis report (BORZAGA et al., 2020), cooperative social enterprises are a clear example of entrepreneurial sustainability and Spain is one of the countries that has played a fundamental role in supporting the growth of social enterprises and second-/third-level organisations. In this way, ‘cooperative movements and, sometimes, second-level associations have been key to the legitimisation of a new type of cooperative, with a declared social aim. Moreover, they have successfully lobbied for the introduction of enabling policies by participating in the drafting of new legislation and policies focussed on social enterprises’ (*id.* p. 50). Spain has introduced legislation designed specifically for social enterprises to further their

¹³ Available at: <https://www.ilo.org>

development. Cooperative regulations have been adjusted and the legal recognition of the Social Initiative Cooperative has enabled the definition of the aims, features, and fields of activity of social enterprises.

In the complementary document prepared for Spain, four autonomous communities account for almost 80% of the total number of Spanish CIS (647): Catalonia with 144 CIS (22.26%), the BC with 141 (21.79%), Andalusia with 132 CIS (20.40%), and Madrid with 96 CIS (14.84%). In the other regions, other types of social enterprises such as special employment centres or employment integration enterprises are more common. As the report itself indicates, ‘the delegation of powers to regional governments affects the status and potential activities of social enterprises. The different regional governments expand the historical delegation of competences in the case of cooperatives and employment fields to other formulas related to social enterprises and can regulate and promote this figure in different ways in each region’ (DÍAZ, MARCUELLO and NOGALES (2020, p. 50). The four regions mentioned apply modern regulations regarding cooperatives that conform to the reality on the ground. In BC, regulations on entrepreneurial promotion cooperatives are noteworthy.

Cooperatives were recognised as playing an essential role in the achievement of the SDGs even before the adoption of the SDGs. Indeed, in 2012, the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly (Rio+20) underlined the potential role of cooperatives in the realisation of sustainable development. Nevertheless, ‘the voices of cooperatives and the cooperative movement are not being heard clearly and their involvement in the process of developing SDGs has not reached its full potential,’ because they were slow to take an active part in the debate on the content of the SDGs (WANYAMA, 2016, p. 5). This author believes that ‘one possible reason for the invisibility of the cooperative option in the debate is a lack of understanding of the actual and potential contribution of cooperatives to sustainable development, partly due to the disparate nature of literature on this subject.’

Moreover, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE) published a position paper in response to concerns that thus far insufficient attention to the role of SSE has been paid in the process of designing a post-2015 development agenda and SDG. UNTFSSSE was established to raise the profile of the SSE in international knowledge and policy circles. They believe that SSE holds considerable promise for addressing the economic, social, and environmental integrated approaches of sustainable development. The UNTFSSSE position paper describes the role of SSE in eight selected issue areas, each of which are central to the challenge of socially sustainable development. In all these areas, different forms of cooperatives produce goods and provide services that respond to unmet needs, mobilising unused resources, engaging in collective provisioning, and managing common-pool resources.¹⁴

¹⁴ Social and Solidarity Economy and the Challenge of Sustainable Development (2014) UNTFSSSE position paper. Selected issue areas: i) The transition from the informal economy to decent work ii) Greening the economy and society, exchange iii) Local economic development, iv) Sustainable cities and human settlements, v) Women's well-being and empowerment, vi) Food security and smallholder empowerment, vii) Universal health coverage, viii) Transformative finance.

In the present day, this situation has changed because numerous studies support the idea that ‘as value-based and principle-driven organizations, cooperative enterprises are by nature a sustainable and participatory form of business. They place emphasis on job security and improved working conditions, pay competitive wages, promote additional income through profit sharing and distribution of dividends, and support community facilities and services such as health clinics and schools. Cooperatives foster democratic knowledge and practices and social inclusion. They have also shown resilience in the face of the economic and financial crises’ (*id.*, p. 4).

Reports from various international, national, and regional organisations¹⁵ as well as from academic literature recognise the fundamental role of cooperatives and offer support to them, noting the contributions they can make to the achievement of each SDG and providing examples of situations where cooperatives are already contributing to sustainable development.

The Opinion of EESC on ‘The External Dimension of the Social Economy’ (2017, p. 3) emphasises that cooperatives are crucial for the implementation of the SDGs. The Committee highlights the leadership of cooperatives in ‘agricultural production, finance and microfinance, the supply of clean water, housing, labour market integration of people with disabilities, the reduction of informal work through collective entrepreneurship initiatives in the social economy, youth employment and women’s rights, which is playing an increasingly important part in the productive activity of cooperatives and mutual undertakings’.

EESC is strongly committed to supporting and promoting SE in Europe and has published three successive studies on this subject since 2008. CIRIEC-International carried out all these studies and, in the last of the studies, highlights ‘values and principles of the cooperative movement and the social economy, such as links with the local area, inter-cooperation, or solidarity, are decisive pillars for guaranteeing sustainable development processes in their triple dimension: environmental, economic and social’ (MONZÓN and CHAVES AVILA, 2017, p. 31). Moreover, the study states that cooperatives, and SE, have been pioneers in the implementation of corporate social responsibility since it is an integral part of their values and operational standards (*id.*, p. 32).

The ICA, and the cooperatives which the ICA unites, represents, and serves, were engaged in sustainable development work even before the adoption of the UN2030 Agenda. For the Alliance to achieve the SDGs is a transversal strategic priority because they ‘have the merit of providing us with the first-ever comprehensive conceptual framework on development with precise goals and indicators on which all the states have agreed upon’.¹⁶

Proof of this comes in the form of the campaign Coops for 2030 or the publications developed in partnership with cooperative development agencies. Coops for 2030 is a campaign for cooperatives to learn more about SDGs, ‘helping cooperative enterprises

¹⁵ International organisations: e.g. EESS, CIRIEC-International, ICA or Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). National organisations: e.g. in Spain, CEPES or Confederación Española de Cooperativas de Trabajo Asociado (COCETA). Regional organisations: e.g. in the BC, Confederación de Cooperativas de Euskadi (KONFEKOOP) or Consejo Superior de Cooperativas de Euskadi (CSCE-EKGK).

¹⁶ICA’s cooperative mission. Available at: <https://www.ica.coop/en/our-work/cooperative-mission>

respond to the UN's call to action and collecting information about cooperative contributions to the 2030 Agenda, in order to better position cooperatives as partners throughout the implementation process'.¹⁷



Among the resources to learn more about sustainable development and sustainability reporting, the ICA published in 2017 the 'Co-ops for 2030: A movement achieving sustainable development for all' report to highlight and summarise the contributions of cooperative enterprises to SDGs, recognising the values of cooperatives and their inter-cooperation to build a better world. The aim of this report is to remind policymakers of the importance of cooperatives as partners and stakeholders in sustainable development initiatives.

One year later, the ICA published the 'Global Policy & Advocacy guide', exploring 'the important contribution that cooperatives make to our global economy and society and shows how these businesses, focused on their core purpose of serving their members, improve the lives of people around the world' (ICA and MUTUO, 2018, p. 3).





COPAC has produced a complete report, 'Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030 series', to raise awareness of the significant contributions of cooperative enterprises towards achieving the UN2030 Agenda in a sustainable, inclusive, and responsible way, and encourage continued support for their efforts. The study entails 17 briefs, one for each SDG.

Table 2 outlines the contributions of cooperatives to the SDGs based on the studies presented above.






Table 2: Contributions of the cooperative movement to SDGs




 <p>SDG 1 NO POVERTY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives exist in all regions of the world and all sectors of the economy; there are many examples of how they contribute to the goal of eradicating poverty. • The cooperative model was invented as a poverty-fighting tool (SDG 1 is in the very DNA of cooperatives). • Cooperatives play a vital role in meeting the poverty reduction and sustainable development targets in extensive regions of Africa, Asia, and America. • Cooperatives provide self-help strategies for people to create their own opportunities and to pool their resources for greater impact.
 <p>SDG 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural cooperatives are key to reducing hunger and poverty. • Cooperatives help small agricultural producers overcome the many challenges they face as individuals while preserving their autonomy. • Through a cooperative, producers can improve their productivity,

¹⁷ Campaign Coops for 2030 Available at: <https://www.ica.coop/en/our-work/coops-for-2030>

<p>ZERO HUNGER</p>	<p>strengthen their position in the value chain, build more sustainable livelihoods for their families and their communities, and produce better food for all.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savings and credit cooperatives are also important means to drive rural investment and development and help end hunger, offering low-interest loans to agriculture and livestock producers, helping them to access the capital necessary to grow, raise, process, transport, and market their products.
<p> SDG 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health cooperatives are important sources of preventative and curative care around the world, responding to the needs of their members, and are a source of affordable care for millions of households around the world. • Their flexibility encourages innovation in design and experimentation with new organisational structures while making them particularly resilient to economic and social crises.
<p> SDG 4 QUALITY EDUCATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, training, and information are among the seven cooperative principles adopted by the ICA. • Many cooperative schools and universities around the world provide a people-focused approach to learning. • Cooperatives also provide essential lifelong learning opportunities for their members, whether they relate to professional development, leadership training, or literacy.
<p> SDG 5 GENDER EQUALITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key aspects of the cooperative identity which help make them drivers of gender equality and women's empowerment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Voluntary and open membership = anyone can join a cooperative without fear of discrimination. ○ Democratically governed by their members = members have an equal voice in decision-making processes. • The cooperative form of enterprise facilitates women's participation in local and national economies, increasing access to education, employment, and work, enabling economic democracy and agency, and boosting leadership and management experience. • The establishment of women's cooperatives is on the rise, particularly among domestic workers, who are often marginalised women in vulnerable economic and social situations.
<p> SDG 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives can offer a model for people in a community to pool their resources and find solutions for improving water and sanitation, particularly in areas where other public and private entities are unable

	or unwilling to invest in providing such services.
 <p>SDG 7</p> <p>AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives can allow communities to transition to renewable energy and sell that energy to increase local wealth. • People-owned renewable energy cooperatives have seen great success in Europe in recent years, and the U.S. has a long history of rural electric cooperatives. • Cooperatives are driven by concern for community, their seventh founding principle, so clean and renewable energy sources are a priority for many cooperatives.
 <p>SDG 8</p> <p>DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives play a significant role in employment creation (direct and indirect) and income generation. • Cooperatives secure the livelihoods of 272 million people in the world (International Organisation of Industrial, Artisanal and Service Producers' Cooperatives [CICOPA]). • Cooperatives are people-centered = sources of decent work. • Cooperatives play a key role in empowering the most vulnerable groups, particularly women, young people, and people with disabilities. • Cooperatives are a valuable tool for reducing the high rates of informal work (50% of all work in the world). • Cooperatives often place more emphasis than their corporate counterparts on employee pay and benefits, offerings of education and training opportunities for workers, and community investment.
 <p>SDG 9</p> <p>INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, AND INFRASTRUCTURE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives are a valuable partner to achieve SDG 9, given their deep roots in local communities and understanding of people's needs. • As member-owned, community-based enterprises, cooperatives can help people to pool their resources to make investments in needed infrastructure (e.g. power generators, electricity supply grids, irrigation facilities) or to improve members' ability to access existing infrastructure. • In terms of industrialisation, cooperatives of small-scale producers have been instrumental in improving their members' access to affordable finance to purchase production inputs promoting their investment in manufacturing and value-adding activities and enhancing their bargaining power and branding in the marketing process. • Regarding innovation, cooperatives play a key role in making new technologies available to producers in rural areas and workers in the informal economy.

 <p>SDG 10</p> <p>REDUCED INEQUALITIES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative enterprises drive equality in various ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open and voluntary membership = anyone, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status, can join if they can commit to the responsibility of being a member. ○ Active engagement of members in cooperatives' governance and operations = increase people's representation and voice and inclusive business practices.
 <p>SDG 11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The founding principle of concern for community = long-term vision for environmentally sound investments, such as energy efficiency, safe and sustainable building materials, and disaster resilience.
 <p>SDG 12</p> <p>RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because the identity of cooperatives is based on ethics and values, they are committed to sustainably using natural resources and promoting sustainable practices to the community. • Cooperatives prioritise the needs of their members and their communities over the maximisation of profit. Thus, they are willing to invest in environmentally smart practices and raise awareness among their members while users and stakeholders do the same. • They early adopt reports of sustainability, with many cooperatives tracking and making available data on their environmental impacts, meeting the commitment of the movement to prioritise information about environmental and social responsibility.
 <p>SDG 13</p> <p>CLIMATE ACTION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided by long-term goals, cooperatives can foster the buy-in for the necessary sacrifices to address climate change. • Organised farmers can achieve better and more environmentally and socially sustainable results together. • Collective action can contribute to change in practices and policies, linking local solutions to national and global goals and challenges such as the SDGs and climate change.
 <p>SDGS 14</p> <p>LIFE BELOW WATER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishery cooperatives have important roles to play in facilitating information exchanges, improving communities' negotiating power with market intermediaries, building partnerships, networks, and linkages to other organisations, and fostering the sharing of traditional and indigenous knowledge. • Fishery cooperatives and other professional and informal organisations can facilitate their members' involvement in policy- and decision-making processes relevant to small-scale fishing communities, empowering fishers and fish workers. • Fishery cooperatives train their members to avoid overfishing and

	adopt sustainable practices.
 <p>SDGS 15 LIFE ON LAND</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As enterprises based on values and principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cooperatives offer a forum for community members to find solutions for environmental change, such as managing the land resources they use responsibly or diversifying their economic activities to embrace green economic ventures. ○ Forestry cooperatives harvest wood in a way that protects and replenishes the area being used, educates the community, and promotes the love of forest ecosystems.
 <p>SDG 16 PEACE, JUSTICE, AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperatives are sources of positive social capital that foster a sense of community, empowerment, and inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They build mutual understanding and contribute to conflict eradication and promotion of peace while shaping inclusive societies. ○ Cooperatives are democracy workshops: Through active member participation and ‘one member, one vote’ governance, they help people to develop their skills as fair decision-makers and to become leaders. ○ Cooperatives are spaces without discrimination, creating an environment conducive for people to strengthen their interpersonal and intergroup relationships.
 <p>SDG 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The global cooperative movement is a vast network with shared goals, working together to strengthen the overall movement, fulfilling the sixth founding principle of cooperation among cooperatives.</i> • <i>The seventh cooperative principle ‘concern for community’ drives cooperatives to work for the sustainable development of their communities through actions approved by their members.</i> • <i>Cooperatives are working with governments, civil society, and the UN system to achieve the SDGs and to develop harmonious policies and practices around cooperatives</i>

Source: Own elaboration based on the reports: *The Opinion of EESC on ‘The External Dimension of the Social Economy’* (2017), *‘Recent Evolutions in the Social Economy in the European Union’* (MONZÓN and CHAVES AVILA, 2017), *‘Co-ops for 2030: A movement achieving sustainable development for all’* (ICA, 2017), *‘Global Policy & Advocacy guide’* (ICA and MUTUO, 2018) and *‘Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030 series’* (COOPAC, 2020).

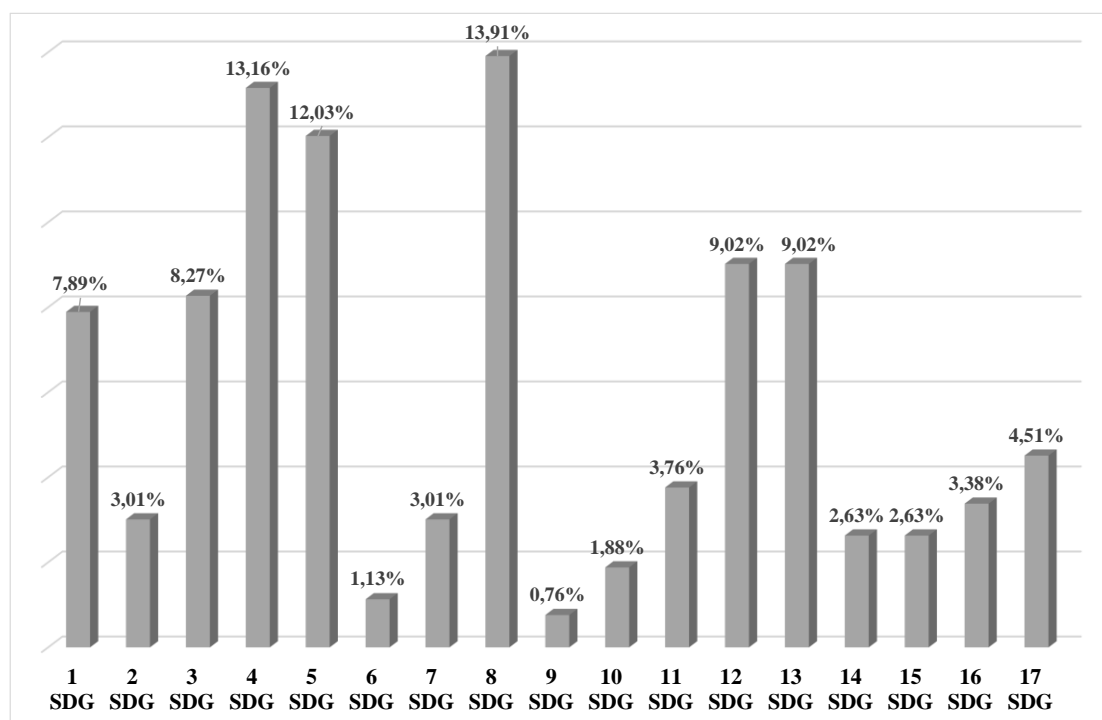
Although there are still unsolved issues (PINEDA OFRENEO, 2019), we can find different studies providing evidence of the contributions of cooperatives to the SDGs. For instance, BATTAGLIA, GRAGNANI, and ANNESI (2020) prove that cooperatives can contribute to sustainability by analysing the annual sustainability reports of the largest Italian cooperatives.

This reality is more apparent on the local level, constituting an important link between the international community and the local one. GUTBERLET (2021) presents the experiences of a National Waste Pickers' movement in Brazil, proving that these recycling cooperatives, supported by public policies and inclusive governance, can tackle several of the SDGs. THIPAKORN (2019) describes successful cross-border cooperation between Japanese and Thai agricultural cooperatives, based on cooperative principles. ARANA LANDIN (2020) recommends empowering sustainable small-scale fishing through SE policies to achieve SDG 14. The author identifies this opportunity because small-scale fishing is a sector that tends to be firmly rooted in local communities, with its traditions and values coinciding with those of the SE. Moreover, fishery cooperatives could provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets. MARTÍNEZ-LEON et al. (2020) make use of a sample of 114 Spanish cooperative firms to analyse the predominant leadership styles and gender differences in Spanish cooperatives. Their results shed light on women's leadership styles in cooperatives and verify that 'the greater presence of women in cooperatives than in other organizations improves their socio-professional position and economic income, consequently, reducing poverty (SDG 1). Findings indicate that the special characteristics of cooperatives contribute to a more egalitarian development of leadership styles where female managers need to improve the perception of their role among male management teams' (*id.*, p. 18).

At the national level, CEPES stands out for its work in encouraging, assisting, defending, and fostering the SE and the movements and sectors that it comprises in Spain. In 2019, it published the report 'La contribución de la Economía Social española a los ODS. 4º INFORME sobre la experiencia de las empresas españolas de Economía Social en la Cooperación al Desarrollo 2017–2019', which gathered cooperation projects of its members. As CEPES declares on its website, 'social economy organisations linked to CEPES are specialized in cooperation projects aimed at creating jobs and generating inclusive economic growth at local level. They support social economy enterprises launched by vulnerable groups (peasants, small agricultural producers, among others) and women in order to increase economic resources, improve their socio-cultural environment and their capacity for social mobilization' (CEPES, 2019, p. 9).¹⁸ Figure 1 shows graphically the percentage of activities and collaborative projects of the CEPES associative network that contribute to each SDG.

¹⁸ Available at: https://www.cepes.es/principal/cepes_development_cooperation&lng=en

Figure 1: Percentage of cooperation projects that contributed to achieving each SDG.



Source: Own elaboration based on the report 'La contribución de la Economía Social española a los ODS. 4º INFORME sobre la experiencia de las empresas españolas de Economía Social en la Cooperación al Desarrollo 2017–2019' (CEPES, 2019).

Basque cooperatives promote many of these projects, confirming, once again, the specific influence of the BCM in the decisive sustainable development work carried out by the cooperative companies. In the work reviewed to date, we find examples of commitments to the SDGs by different cooperatives at a global and national level. As we have already mentioned, we have identified significant Basque initiatives among them. In this study, we have sought to recover some of these examples and add to them to take a complete picture of the BCM's firm commitment to the UN Agenda 2030. First, we identify the contributions of the cooperatives of the MCC to each of the SDGs. Hereafter, we present several examples of the BCM representative of the cooperative and sustainable development efforts made by the other Basque cooperatives.

5. Mondragon Cooperative Experience

In the present day, MCC¹⁹ is the leading business group in the BC and one of the largest corporations in Spain. It operates across the world, with 141 production plants in 37 countries, commercial business in 53, and sales in more than 150. MCC divides its

¹⁹ Available at: <https://www.mondragon-corporation.com/en/>

organisation into four areas: Finance, Industry, Retail, and Knowledge. It currently consists of 96 separate, self-governing cooperatives, more than 81,000 people, and 14 R&D centres.

Its mission is based on decent, quality employment, health and safety at work, education, sustainable consumption, innovation as the lever for a digital and eco-friendly transition, and support for social and community infrastructures and initiatives. In this mission, its cooperative principles are, among others, inter-cooperation, grassroots management, corporate social responsibility, innovation, democratic organisation, education, and social transformation.

In 2020 it was included in *Fortune* magazine's 'Change the World' list, being ranked eleventh worldwide. According to *Fortune* magazine, one of the indications of MCC's success is that 'as the world's largest federation of worker-owned cooperatives, it has grown in part because it doesn't disproportionately enrich top brass. No top executive makes more than six times the salary of the lowest-paid worker in his or her cooperative (and all earn far less than \$1 million annually).'²⁰ Moreover, MCC meets every target area of the Agenda 2030. Below, we summarise these contributions, as reported by the group for 2019.



NO POVERTY

- Foster social projects in both developed and developing countries.
- **Mundukide Foundation** improves the lives of 80.000 people in Africa and Latin America.
- **Ulma Foundation** allocates 0.7% of its profits to cooperation projects in developing countries.
- €26.9 million of resources are intended for social content activities.



ZERO HUNGER

- Humanitarian support for vulnerable groups.
- **Eroski** and its customers make substantial donations so that almost 10,000 people have had their annual dietary needs catered to.
- **Ausolan** develops protocols for the donation of surplus food in central kitchens. In 2019 this amounted to approximately 30,000 kg of food.

²⁰ Available at: <https://fortune.com/packages/october-2020/>



GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- Foster activities and projects to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for those of all ages.
- **LagunAro** provides healthcare and social welfare for 28,204 active members, 73,172 healthcare beneficiaries, and 14,544 senior citizens.
- **Ulma Foundation** works with entities involved in health welfare, senior citizen care, and work-life balance.
- **Ausolan** designs meals that are safe, nutritious, healthy, sustainable, and tasty. They work at schools, companies, hospitals, and nursing homes, catering to the needs of each person.



QUALITY EDUCATION

- MCG is a benchmark in advanced educational models and is a pioneer in dual training programmes.
- Pre-university training centres: **Arizmendi Ikastola**, **Lea Artibai Ikastetxea**, **Politeknika Ikastegia Txorierri**
- **Mondragon University**
- Technology centres: **Lortek**, **Ikerlan**, **Leartiker**, **IDEKO**
- **Mondragon Foundation** promotes education and socio-cooperative and professional training, as well as the research and development mandated to raise their level of technology.
- **ULMA Foundation** supports the SE through education and socio-cooperative and professional training, and the dissemination of the precepts of cooperativism.
- **Azaro Fundazioa** disseminates a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation while promoting cooperative values.
- **Gizabidea** encourages culture and education, creating its educational infrastructure and system, to transform people and society in general. **Gizabidea** is the outcome of the joint efforts of the cooperatives and in particular **Fagor Group**, which has assigned part of its earnings to research and education.



GENDER EQUALITY

- Almost half of the people working for MCG are women. 26.8% of management committees and 29.1% of boards of directors are women
- 95% of **Ausolan**'s staff are women and its board of directors is made up of 5 women and 2

men.



AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

- MCG delivers international turnkey projects in electrical engineering and automation for wastewater treatment plants.
- KREAN S. Coop. synergise its actions with the Basque Energy Agency (Basque Government) on the construction of a solar energy park, providing clean energy to BC. This solar energy park has a set of 66,000 latest-generation solar panels, which can produce approximately 40,000 MWh per year (electrical energy equivalent to the electricity consumption of 15,000 families in a year) and avoid the emission of around 14,600 tonnes of CO₂.



DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

- MCG is the largest employer in the BC and among the top ten nationwide.
- 55% of workers with a certified occupational health and safety management system.
- Laboral Kutxa, their cooperative bank, promotes territorial development.
- **Azaro Fundazioa** participates in the creation of new innovative businesses in the Basque district of Lea-Artibai.



INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- MGC has an innovative business ecosystem, R&D centres, and a university employing over 2,000 people.
- 90% of sales with a certified quality management system.



REDUCED INEQUALITIES

- The MCC business model generates equity, quality of life, and equal opportunities with:
 - A more supportive remuneration package.
 - Redistribution of results.
 - Divisional restructuring. Corporate funds (contributed €37.9 million in 2019).
- **ULMA Foundation** promotes equality and social and labour inclusion for underserved communities.



SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

- MGC creates cities that are more sustainable and inclusive, improves citizens' quality of life, creates jobs and wealth, and offers equal growth opportunities.
- **SmartEnCity, a project** that aims to develop a systemic approach to transforming European cities into sustainable, smart, and resource-efficient urban environments, developing strategies to reduce energy demand and maximise renewable energy supply.
- **Lagun Aro Insurances (Social Perspective)** performs important work in society and in its three operating areas: the promotion of popular sport, cultural events, and the launch of projects for improving the quality of life of the victims of road accidents.
- MGC encourages the use of Euskera among its cooperatives.



RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

- Health and sustainability are the pillars of our consumer model, which is firmly committed to local products. Over 50% of our suppliers are small, local producers.
- **Eroski's** remit is the promotion and protection of consumers and, in particular, education and information on consumer affairs:
 - Its programme 'Food and Healthy Habits Education' trains more than 15% of primary school children in the state.
 - 38,019 tonnes of waste recycled or recovered according to the principles of the circular economy.
 - 2,479 small local producers in its supplier network.
- **Ulma Foundation** Agroecology, food sovereignty, sustainable transport, energy, general environmental stewardship.
- **Ausolan's** project promotes local products in order to boost the sustainability of the entire value chain.



CLIMATE ACTION

- MCG aspires to a carbon-free economy.
- 90% of its sales have quality management certificates and 75% have certified environmental management systems.



LIFE BELOW WATER



- MCG supports the Sustainable Fisheries project sponsored by the WWF.

LIFE ON LAND



- MCC is involved in projects for recovering local wildlife, forestry management, and the sustainable farming of local produce.

PEACE, JUSTICE, AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



- The cooperative model fosters transparency and grassroots involvement in ownership, management, and results.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

- MCC is the outcome of intercooperation. It has entered into agreements with numerous international networks and alliances for increasing its scope for social transformation.
 - Knowledge exchange and external exchange forums.
 - Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. MCC is a member of the Business Leaders Caucus.

6. Other examples of BCM

BEROHI S. COOP.

Non-profit cooperative of public utility and social initiative dedicated to textile recovery. Founded in 2000 by Rezikleta, S. Coop., and Cáritas Bizkaia. It provides services for the collection, handling, processing, and sale of second-hand textile products and accessories.

BEROHI S. COOP.'S CONTRIBUTIONS

SDGs

- Innovative model, proposing an integral solution in the field of recovered textiles.
- Socio-occupational insertion and training of people being socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion.
- Environmental protection, minimising waste.
- Promoting development cooperation projects in other countries.



BARRENETXE S. COOP.²¹

²¹ Available at: <https://barrenetxe.com/>

Professional farmers' cooperative founded in 1980. It dedicates itself to the production of the traditional vegetable of the BC. They have market gardens distributed between the coast and the interior of Bizkaia (Lea-Artibai and Uribe-Kosta).

BARRENETXE S. COOP.'S CONTRIBUTIONS

- Proximity to and versatility in the market.
- Commitment to the taste and quality of authentic local products.
- Environmentally friendly production. Cultivation of old autochthonous varieties and continuous production throughout the year, growing in soil or other substrates, both outdoors and in greenhouses.
- Traditional farmers, but also pioneers. They apply innovative techniques suitable for the sustainability of the rural environment.
- They use natural resources and production mechanisms that facilitate the medium-term development of more sustainable agriculture.
- Identification of production processes that allows them to guarantee traceability and food safety.
- They have all products certified in sustainable production systems such as Integrated Production and Global Gap. Compromiso con el sabor y la calidad de los auténticos productos.



KOOPERA SERVICIOS AMBIENTALES, S. COOP. I. S.

Social initiative cooperative dedicated to the integral management of resources. Its social objective is the support and socio-labour insertion of unemployed people being socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion, with special difficulties in accessing the labour market. Its objective is social and ecological efficiency. It provides waste collection, management, and recycling services.

KOOPERA SERVICIOS AMBIENTALES, S.COOP.I.S.'S CONTRIBUTIONS


- Social initiative cooperative dedicated to the integral management of resources.
- They promote the social integration of people and groups suffering from any kind of social exclusion.
- The company's staff participates in an insertion itinerary, receiving personalised advice and support.
- Development of activities for the defence of the environment.
- The economic benefits obtained are dedicated to:
 - Environmental and solidarity purposes.



- Creation of employment for groups at risk of exclusion.
- Training for the professionalisation of groups at risk of exclusion.

GRUPO SERVICIOS SOCIALES INTEGRADOS S. COOP.²²

A company created in 1986 by 35 women who, based on their values, chose the legal form of a cooperative. The company integrates social initiatives and public utility companies, made up of professionals and managers. Its two main areas of work are care for people in situations of dependency in the home and care for people in situations of social vulnerability.

GRUPO SERVICIOS SOCIALES INTEGRADOS S. COOP.'S CONTRIBUTIONS	SDGs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds comprehensively and innovatively to the social needs of people in a situation of social vulnerability and dependence in the BC. • Collaborates with the ageing ecosystem in tackling the challenge of longevity. • Integration of innovative aspects such as e-health or new technologies at the service of people (Home Care Lab innovation division). • Knowledge management for carers to acquire digital skills through training specialities linked to ICT and integrated care. (Socio-health Living Lab and Training Centre). • Active participation in European socio-technological innovation projects. • Support and mentoring of social entrepreneurship projects in the social and healthcare sector (SOCHEM HUB Division). • Establishment of alliances to improve their services and, therefore, improve the quality of life of the people they serve. 	

7. Conclusions

This research aims to analyse the evolution of the BCM and its impact on the sustainable socio-economic development of the BC, from the perspective of the UN2030 Agenda.

To contextualise and justify the objective of the study, we have identified the 17 SDGs that guide cooperatives. Based on the principles and values laid out in these goals, cooperatives are born out of a spirit of collaboration and respect for the environment. Therefore, confirming the existing literature, we have been able to verify that cooperatives are in an exceptional position to collaborate in the achievement of the SDGs. In fact, they have played this role since their creation in the 19th century.

²² Available at: www.gruposoci.es

Additionally, we have corroborated the findings of studies that have for many years been proclaiming the significant value of the BCM. We have supplemented this information with the latest available data, confirming the significance of the BCM in the economy of the region and its influence on the national economy both historically and in the current era.

From the information gathered, we can conclude that the unique characteristics of cooperatives are not a hazard to their viability. On the contrary, the awareness and level-headedness with which the members manage these enterprises are the key to their success, making them more resilient in times of crisis.

Finally, the business experiences presented are a true reflection of the environmental responsibility of the cooperatives, existing in each of the decisions they take, as well as in their firm commitment to the well-being of their workers and society. After analysing the progress of the BCM, we conclude that the Basque cooperatives have been able to adapt and internalise global objectives to their immediate environment. At the same time, they have also understood the scope of the common good pursued by the SDGs and have established the necessary interrelationships to collaborate at a global level.

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