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DOSSIÊ TEMÁTICO

The social construction of the Solidarity Economy in Brazil: Perspectives for promoting decent work through decentralized cooperatives

A construção social da Economia Solidária no Brasil: perspectivas para a promoção do trabalho decente a partir das cooperativas descentralizadas

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Abstract

This article analyzes the potential of the Solidarity Economy to promote decent work based on the experience of decentralized cooperatives. From the perspective of Economic Sociology, we highlight that markets are socially constructed and that institutions shape both market dynamics and the levels of social protection of labor. The article emphasizes the relevance of decentralized cooperatives for the solidarity economy, decent work, and the promotion of social protection.

Keywords: Economic Sociology; Solidarity Economy; Decent Work; decentralized cooperatives.

Resumo

O artigo analisa as potencialidades da Economia Solidária para promover o trabalho decente a partir da experiência das cooperativas descentralizadas. Na perspectiva da Sociologia Econômica, evidenciamos que os mercados são socialmente construídos e que as instituições moldam tanto a esfera mercantil quanto os níveis de proteção social do trabalho. O artigo enfatiza a relevância das cooperativas descentralizadas para a economia solidária, o trabalho decente e promoção da proteção social.

Palavras-chave: Sociologia Econômica; Economia Solidária; Trabalho Decente; cooperativas descentralizadas.

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the process of the social construction of the solidarity economy in Brazil through the experience of decentralized cooperatives in family farming. Drawing on the theoretical and methodological framework of economic sociology, we demonstrate that markets are socially constructed and that institutions shape both the sphere of market exchange and the configuration of labor relations and social protection systems. The central analytical perspective guiding this study is that the solidarity economy—structured through decentralized cooperatives—has the potential to foster more and better employment opportunities grounded in social dialogue and social protection, in line with what the International Labour Organization has termed Decent Work (ILO, 1999).

From a theoretical standpoint, the study builds on contributions from economic sociology, particularly the seminal perspective advanced by Weber, according to which social action is oriented by values and markets are constituted as arenas of struggle. At the same time, a form of substantive rationality persists, anchored in social conventions, cultural processes, cognitive frameworks, and political arrangements. From this sociological perspective, the solidarity economy can be understood as a form of economic organization that challenges or reconfigures traditional capitalist logic by placing social relations, cooperation, and solidarity—rather than purely instrumental rationality—at the center of economic activity.

Indeed, the solidarity economy has been identified by the United Nations as an important response to the challenges of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution "Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development" (A/RES/77/281) (Nações Unidas, 2023), which called for cooperation among states and other social actors in order to advance these goals through the development of the social and solidarity economy (Villano; Pisso, 2025).

Although solidarity-based organizations—including cooperatives and associations—can contribute to all seventeen SDGs (Mariosa et al., 2022), their most significant contribution relates to SDG 8, which focuses on decent work and economic growth. This is largely because the solidarity economy primarily involves socially vulnerable groups, such as rural workers, quilombola communities, women, youth, older adults, and people with disabilities.

The concept of "decent work" began to be widely used in 1999 as a critical response to the growing commodification of labor, reflecting aspirations to restore dignity and stability to modern work. In the words of the ILO, decent work refers to "productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity, in which rights are protected and which includes adequate remuneration and social protection" (ILO, 2014, p. 371). This

critique was directed primarily at the globalization of markets and its consequences for the dismantling of national labor protection systems. Despite the acknowledged relevance of the solidarity economy and cooperativism for achieving the SDGs—already emphasized by multilateral organizations—relatively few national and international studies examine how cooperative governance and its intrinsic organizational logic contribute to the promotion of decent work, as highlighted by Vaccaro, Pereira and Parente (2024).

In this study, we examine the role of decentralized cooperatives in promoting decent work. Because these organizations do not rely on centralized physical infrastructures, they tend to preserve more democratic internal decision-making and management processes. Their main functions include supporting family farmers in accessing public procurement policies, such as institutional markets linked to the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), facilitating the certification of agroindustrial production, and enabling participation in short food supply chains, including local farmers' markets and solidarity economy fairs (Wolf Farias; Búrigo, 2025).

In addition to this introductory section, which presents the topic and scope of the article, the paper is organized as follows. First, we present the theoretical framework, highlighting relevant contributions from economic sociology addressing the solidarity economy, institutional markets, and decent work. Next, in the results and discussion section of the documentary research, we examine decentralized cooperatives and the Funrural scheme as both a legal framework and a public policy instrument that promote social protection and the principles of decent work. Finally, drawing on empirical research, we demonstrate how rural solidarity economy enterprises access institutional markets through decentralized cooperatives and how this organizational arrangement contributes to income generation and social protection for their members.

2. Connections between Economic Sociology, Solidarity Economy and Decent Work

Conceptually, economic sociology constitutes a field of knowledge and a research tradition that understands the economy as a socially embedded sphere—that is, as a social and institutional construction (Polanyi, 2000). It is considered a social construction insofar as, as Max Weber observed, economic action cannot be explained solely by individual motivations but is mediated by social relations and interactions (Weber, 1991).

Grounded in classical sociological and anthropological traditions, economic sociology has experienced renewed vitality since the 1980s with the seminal works of Harrison White and Mark Granovetter. At the same time, the economy is understood as an institutional construction. As emphasized by Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, economic behavior presupposes the existence of political and normative structures that shape individual action, ranging from fundamental social arrangements to what are often referred

to as prevailing mental habits (Laville, 2014).

Economic sociology therefore analyzes how the material conditions of life are produced and reproduced through social processes. This field of research is commonly organized around two major analytical axes: the sociology of markets and the sociology of consumption (Fligstein; Dioun, 2015).

The sociology of markets conceptualizes markets as socially constructed arenas in which recurrent exchanges take place between buyers and sellers, regulated by both formal and informal norms that structure relationships among competitors, suppliers, and clients. In this sense, markets do not operate autonomously but depend on the actions of governments, legal frameworks, and cultural understandings that sustain and legitimize economic activity. Similarly, labor relations and working conditions are not the outcome of a self-regulating market but are structured through complex dynamics of social power, collective action, institutional regulation, and conflict.

Different analytical perspectives contribute to understanding the mechanisms through which markets are organized, including studies on social networks, institutions, political economy, and market devices, as well as analyses of the performativity of economic ideas (Callon, 2010; Brisset, 2019).

The sociology of consumption, in turn, situates consumption within the broader framework of the social meanings attributed to the act of consuming. A central premise is that consumption is closely tied to the construction of lifestyles, which may be shaped either through the emulation of other social groups or through symbolic competition for status. Moreover, consumption is traversed by moral and symbolic dimensions that influence which goods may or may not be bought and sold.

Within this field, numerous studies examine the processes through which certain goods become commodities—or resist commodification—and how these boundaries shift over time. From the perspective of economic sociology, the solidarity economy may be understood both as a socially constructed market arena in which social actors relate to one another, cooperate, and engage in exchanges mediated by cultural understandings, and as a domain of consumption marked by different meanings attached to the act of consuming, such as ethical consumption or political consumption, for example. Accordingly, solidarity economy enterprises (SEEs) do not operate in isolation, but depend on the existence of public policies, legal frameworks, and cultural values that structure and legitimize economic action. The role of government is crucial, whether through the construction of public policies that support SEEs in rural settings, through the stability afforded by access to institutional markets such as the National School Feeding Program, or, in urban contexts, through the development of Public Centers for the Solidarity Economy that provide socio-productive technical assistance (Vieira, 2023). With respect to the structuring of labor relations, the role

of the state is even more significant, as evidenced by the enactment of Law No. 12.690/2012, which regulates worker cooperatives and serves as an instrument for combating the precarization of jobs organized on an associative basis (Pereira; Silva, 2012).

Indeed, by definition, a solidarity economy enterprise constitutes the concrete materialization of what is understood as the solidarity economy, namely, an economic activity organized around associative labor, collective ownership of the means of production, and self-management or shared management. In Singer's terms, it is a specific social form of production, a mode of production centered on human beings and solidarity, one that differs from and stands in opposition to the dominant capitalist model of production based on wage labor and on the contradictions between capital and labor (Singer, 2002).

In the Brazilian context, solidarity economy enterprises assume multiple organizational forms, which directly shape the ways in which they structure and carry out their activities. Among these forms are associations—often found among family farmers and artisans—cooperatives (including credit, production, commercialization, consumption, and waste-picker cooperatives), recovered enterprises, informal productive groups, barter clubs, commercialization centers, community banks, and solidarity funds (Gaiger, 2003).

This diversity of collective initiatives reveals considerable heterogeneity in terms of organizational forms and modes of operation. More broadly, this social reality is marked by structural fragilities, scarcity of resources, and, not infrequently, obstacles that limit the possibilities for consolidation and development. Laville likewise emphasizes this diversity by interpreting the solidarity economy as a plural form of economic organization that extends beyond both market and state, articulating economic, social, and political dimensions. For Laville, the solidarity economy is not merely about "generating income": it involves democratic management, the active participation of social subjects, and the collective construction of decisions. In other words, it is an economic practice with political content, one that strengthens citizenship even as it confronts challenges and difficulties (Laville, 2023). Although these experiences are often subjected to processes of marginalization, they demonstrate not only that another world is possible —to invoke the well-known slogan of the World Social Forum—but that it is already under construction, taking shape in a multiplicity of social practices that, though at times fragile, are concrete and effective (Laville, 2023).

In this sense, it becomes necessary to move beyond a hermeneutics oriented by skepticism and to abandon the systematic disqualification of initiatives that challenge capitalist hegemony. Even under adverse conditions, such initiatives affirm and materialize principles of reciprocity, equality, and solidarity, thereby configuring real alternatives within the existing social order.

In contrast to the formalist perspective in economics, the solidarity economy lays claim to a substantive approach, according to which economic activity is structured by a plurality of principles of integration—not only the market, but also redistribution, reciprocity, and domesticity. Karl Polanyi (2008) is widely recognized for clarifying the distinctions between these two approaches, as well as for systematizing anthropological contributions that underpin the heterodox conception of substantive economy. However, by concentrating his analysis on the critique of modernity as a market society, Polanyi did not fully mobilize this pluralist analytical framework for interpreting contemporary economies.

In this context, the contributions of South American authors become particularly relevant, especially through their studies of the popular economy conceived as an economy of labor, which constituted one of the central foundations for the emergence of the solidarity economy (Coraggio, 2011; Quijano, 2011; Razeto, 1993). In addition, innovative institutional experiences—such as the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador—offer significant contributions to the legal institutionalization of a solidarity economy integrated within a plural economy, conceived as an instrument for the realization of buen vivir (Acosta, 2016).

According to Karl Polanyi, economic systems are not organized exclusively by the market, but are structured through different principles of economic integration that vary historically and according to forms of social organization. In his substantive perspective, the economy is embedded in social, political, and cultural relations, which means that activities of production and circulation cannot be understood autonomously or in isolation from social life.

Public policies aimed at promoting the solidarity economy constitute a matter of considerable importance for the generation of work and income and have been the object of numerous studies in Brazil (Schiochet, 2009; Nagem; Silva, 2013; Singer, 2014; Silva;Ferreira, 2024). The scholarly literature has documented actions developed in the areas of commercialization, technical support, enterprise formalization, access to credit, and cooperation in support of the solidarity economy. However, public policies addressing workers' social security and social protection within the sphere of the solidarity economy remain less studied. In the following section, we present decentralized cooperatives and their relevance both to the formation of markets and to the expansion of higher levels of decent work and social protection through the regulatory framework of Funrural.

3. Methodology

This study employed the following methodological resources: bibliographic research; documentary research on the norms and declarations of the International Labour Organization, with an emphasis on the foundations of decent work; and research on the legal texts governing Funrural, particularly Complementary Law No. 11 of May 25, 1971. The

central analytical perspective guiding this reflection is that the solidarity economy—structured through decentralized cooperatives—has the potential to foster more and better employment opportunities based on social dialogue and social protection, in the direction of what the International Labour Organization has termed Decent Work. In order to understand the role of decentralized cooperatives in this regard, primary data were collected in October 2025 through field research conducted in a cooperative located in the city of Criciúma, in the state of Santa Catarina. In the social sciences, field research is a fundamental method through which the researcher enters directly into the natural environment of a social group—the "field"—in order to study, experience, and observe its culture. It relies primarily on participant observation and interviews, with the aim of understanding reality, behaviors, and interactions from the standpoint of the subjects themselves. In the following section, we present the results of the different phases of the research, beginning with bibliographic, documentary, and field research.

4. Results and Discussion: Decent Work and the Potential of Decentralized Cooperatives under the Funrural Legal Framework

Beginning in the 1990s and 2000s, the global economic landscape underwent profound transformations. On the basis of a new infrastructure built on information and communication technologies, and driven by policies of deregulation and economic liberalization implemented by governments and international organizations, a global economy was consolidated through a process of uneven globalization. Fligstein, a leading figure in economic sociology, emphasizes that in this process of constructing the architecture of globalization, large corporations and governments struggle to define the rules of global markets in ways that favor their own interests, thereby creating strategic action fields in which dominant actors shape the rules of the game (Fligstein, 2001), including in ways that contribute to the flexibilization of labor conditions and relations (Gereffi, 2018).

In this context of intense change and growing social inequality, the concept of decent work emerged through the writings of Director-General Juan Somavia as both a response to and a recalibration of the programs and guidelines of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for member states, particularly developing countries. This concept reflects the institution's commitment to resisting the commodification of labor and to building a fairer and more inclusive economy, aligned, in the words of the ILO itself, with a fairer globalization (ILO, 2008). The efforts surrounding the launch of this concept derive, in part, from a foundational document of the institution—the Declaration on Fundamental Rights at Work—which highlights the effects of globalization on the precarization of labor, as well as from Somavia's own perspective as the first Latin American Director-General of the ILO.

Our documentary research highlights that decent work is the conjunction of four strategic objectives of the ILO: respect for fundamental rights at work, policies aimed at promoting productive and quality employment, the extension of social protection, and the strengthening of social dialogue. In the Brazilian context, a viable alternative within the complex framework of the country's social question is the construction of social and economic logics capable of guaranteeing work and income for populations historically excluded from the formal and socially protected labor market. In this context, the organized social movement of the solidarity economy and the principles of cooperativism bring to the fore a debate on economic action as a form of social action grounded in substantive rationality—guided by values such as self-management and cooperation—capable of promoting social inclusion through improved levels of decent work driven both by public policies and by individual practices of ethical and political consumption.

The solidarity economy has attracted the attention of researchers both in Brazil and abroad, particularly insofar as it has emerged in the public sphere through demands advanced by diverse socially vulnerable groups (França-Filho, 2001; Laville, 2024; Silva, 2025). Initiatives supporting the solidarity economy in Brazil date back to the 1980s, with the first governmental actions in this field being implemented in the municipalities of Porto Alegre (RS), Belém (PA), Santo André (SP), followed by Recife (PE) and São Paulo (SP). Among these experiences, the most emblematic include those of the state government of Rio Grande do Sul, which pioneered the implementation of state-level public policies directed toward the solidarity economy (Schiochet, 2009; Praxedes, 2009). The strengthening of urban periphery groups and participatory budgeting constituted the first steps toward the effective organization of solidarity economy public policies in the city of Porto Alegre.

By the end of the 2000s, the solidarity economy had experienced significant growth both in Brazil and in various regions of Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa. This phenomenon may have been a response to the worsening global financial and economic crisis of 2008, which pushed much of the world economy into stagnation, if not recession. As a consequence, unemployment and poverty increased, phenomena attributed to the implementation of austerity policies imposed by a deregulated global financial system that sustained tax havens and generated high speculative profits (Singer, 2014).

Researchers in this field argue that, because the solidarity economy is a development policy aimed at historically excluded populations or at groups facing increasing poverty and social exclusion, it requires not only specific sectoral actions but also cross-cutting initiatives capable of integrating instruments from various policy areas within government and the state. These areas include education, health, the environment, labor, housing, economic development, technology, credit, and finance, among others, with the aim of creating an environment that effectively promotes social emancipation and sustainability. To understand the solidarity economy as a strategy and policy of solidaristic

development implies recognizing it as a set of instruments and tools institutionalized as permanent rights of workers, as well as a duty of the republican and democratic state (Praxedes, 2009).

It was in this context that the National Secretariat for the Solidarity Economy (SENAES) was created in 2003, in fulfillment of the government's program and in view of resuming Brazilian economic development and implementing its then-priority goal: the Zero Hunger Program. With the creation of SENAES, coordinated by Paul Singer, the solidarity economy movement, previously present only in parts of the national territory, rapidly expanded and became national in scope. Alongside the establishment of the Secretariat, June 2003 also saw the creation of the Brazilian Forum on the Solidarity Economy and the National Network of Public Policy Managers for the Solidarity Economy. More recently, Law No. 15.068/2024 (the Paul Singer Law) officially recognized the solidarity economy in Brazil and defined mechanisms for its regulation, creating public and support structures intended to strengthen this model of social and economic organization. More broadly, this field encompasses collective productive and commercial activities based on self-management, cooperation, and democratic participation. Associations, cooperatives, productive groups, and other collective initiatives may thus benefit, provided they adopt principles such as democratic management, direct member participation, and fair distribution of results. Article 6 of Law No. 15.068/2024 establishes that the National Solidarity Economy Policy is intended to promote conditions that ensure a dignified life for citizens, while strengthening social participation, associativism, and cooperativism. The law seeks to recognize different forms of solidarity-based enterprises, contributing to income generation, the reduction of inequalities, and the expansion of equity. It also provides for access to support instruments, markets, and social technologies, while encouraging sustainable practices, conscious consumption, decent work, and the articulation of networks that enhance sustainable territorial development.

At the same time, social actors involved in the solidarity economy created regional and state-level forums to articulate their agendas and establish channels of production and trade. One of the organizational formats for commercialization channels that has become particularly prominent in the solidarity economy and in the cooperative sector of Santa Catarina is that of the so-called Decentralized Family Farming Cooperatives (CDAF). This model encompasses a range of related experiences, many of which had previously been known under other designations, such as virtual cooperatives (Estevam; Mior, 2014). CDAFs stand out because they do not create their own centralized physical structures for product transformation, while also preserving internal decision-making and management processes of a more democratic character. Their main functions are to assist family farming in accessing public food procurement policies and certifying the agroindustrial production of farmers. They are also characterized by operating with a variety of products, unlike most conventional

cooperatives. The strategy adopted by CDAFs is consistent with the interests of their associated farmers, who often seek to incorporate new forms of value addition while maintaining a broader productive base linked to their traditions. This orientation directs CDAF action toward greater diversification, improved product quality, and access to institutional markets.

In the state of Santa Catarina, with the aim of mitigating risks and enabling access to the formal market, family farmers have sought to structure cooperative networks, especially those organized as decentralized cooperatives. Although such networks also include other organizational forms—such as condominiums, associations, and product-specialized cooperatives—decentralized cooperatives constitute one of the most recent organizational innovations within family farming (Mior et al., 2014).

According to these authors, decentralized cooperatives are organizational arrangements that bring together multiple enterprises and different activities developed within family farming. Their structure consists of a central headquarters and productive units and/or agroindustrial production branches located on the properties or in the rural communities of the members. These units are therefore territorially decentralized in relation to the cooperative's headquarters, and their formalization occurs through loan-for-use contracts that establish the transfer and use of productive structures by the cooperative. For purposes of legal regularization, these units are ceded to the cooperative through this contractual instrument, which is why they are termed "decentralized." These units constitute formalized enterprises linked to a cooperative and use the same National Registry of Legal Entities (CNPJ) as the cooperative organization itself (Estevam et al., 2014; Mior et al., 2014).

As Estevam et al., (2011) emphasize, this model of cooperative organization has contributed to overcoming important obstacles related to the commercialization of products originating in family farming, especially with respect to the requirements of tax and sanitary legislation. Moreover, this organizational arrangement makes it possible to achieve minimum production scales and to enable more efficient logistical processes. In this sense, decentralized cooperatives may be understood as a mechanism that facilitates a more autonomous insertion of family farmers into the market, allowing more direct forms of access and reducing dependence on the intermediation exercised by large agro-industries and traditional cooperatives (Mior *et al*., 2014).

One of the main elements distinguishing decentralized cooperatives from the traditional cooperative model lies in the absence of centralized fixed assets within the organization. In this format, each member remains the owner of the means of production and responsible for the stages of production and distribution, using the cooperative primarily as legal support and as a commercialization channel (Bialokorski Neto, 2002). In this context, intermediation in the commercialization process is reduced, which helps

decrease transaction costs between buying and selling. Moreover, this configuration brings producers and consumers closer together, fostering relations of trust insofar as it enables the identification of product origin. With regard to commercialization, the reduced presence of traditional intermediaries allows consumers access to quality products, often associated with artisanal forms of production, while establishing a more balanced and fair price relationship between the parties involved (Estevam et al., 2014).

In addition, decentralized cooperatives provide family farmers with greater productive flexibility, allowing the diversification of agricultural and agroindustrial activities. Unlike integration systems with agro-industries, in which producers often specialize in a single product in order to meet specific demands, this model enables farmers to decide more autonomously what to produce, how to produce it, and to which markets their production should be directed. Such flexibility broadens the possibilities for insertion into new market dynamics. Moreover, the financial results derived from production and commercialization activities are distributed primarily among cooperative members, with only a small percentage retained to cover operating costs and comply with the requirements established by cooperative legislation (Estevam et al., 2011).

Likewise, it is important to emphasize the relevance of CDAFs in enabling rural solidarity economy enterprises to collect mandatory social security contributions and to access short supply chains and solidarity economy fairs, whether through formalization or through compliance with current sanitary regulations required for commercialization in public spaces (Farias; Búrigo, 2025).

During the research, it was possible to visit and observe the functioning of a CDAF and to assess the extent to which it contributes to the field of the solidarity economy and to decent work. The family cooperative visited was Produção Agrícola Nova Vida (Cooper Nova Vida), headquartered in Criciúma, Santa Catarina, founded in 2012 to bring together small producers with a focus on the production and commercialization of organic and conventional food products. According to the interview conducted by the authors with the acting president, the CDAF has more than 200 members and is active in the negotiation and distribution of local family farm production. According to the interview, the cooperative's main objective is to strengthen income generation in family farming, particularly through participation in public calls for food provision via the National School Feeding Program (PNAE).

Indeed, PNAE is an important public policy that creates market opportunities for family farming, especially because many farmers face difficulties in accessing commercial networks. By generating institutional demand for food, the program helps connect these producers with other economic and social actors, strengthening the local economy and encouraging debate on rural production, consumption, and public health. In addition, PNAE

aims to promote student development, improve school performance, and encourage healthy eating habits through adequate meals and food education initiatives. The program serves all students in the public school system and is regarded as one of the largest and most comprehensive school feeding programs in the world, as well as one of the oldest and most important food and nutrition policies in Brazil (Silva, 2023).

PNAE originated in policies initiated in the 1950s to guarantee food for students in public schools. At first, the program had different names, such as the School Meals Campaign and the National School Feeding Campaign, until it came to be called PNAE in 1979. Inspired by the U.S. National School Lunch Program (NSLP), its main objective was to reduce malnutrition among students and improve their eating habits.

Over time, the program underwent important changes. Beginning with Law No. 11.947 of 2009, it was established that at least 30% of the resources allocated to PNAE must be used to purchase food from family farming. Thus, in addition to guaranteeing healthy food for students in basic education, the program also strengthens family farming, generates income for small producers, and promotes the integration of education and agricultural policies in Brazil (Ipolito, 2025).

During the interview, the cooperative coordinator explained that in 2025, Law No. 15.226/2025 increased from 30% to at least 45% the share of PNAE resources that municipalities must allocate to the direct purchase of products from family farming. It was emphasized that the measure aims to strengthen the rural economy, promote healthy foods, and prioritize settlements, traditional communities, and cooperatives managed by women.

After visiting the facilities, we raised questions regarding farmers' access to social security and social protection rights, highlighted in the principles of decent work, and also regarding the role played by the cooperative in this context. The coordinator then explained how the so-called Funrural (Rural Worker Assistance Fund) operates.

According to his account, Funrural is a mandatory social security contribution for members of rural cooperatives, levied on the gross revenue from the commercialization of production at a rate of 1.5 percent. He emphasized that it functions as a kind of rural social security scheme, financed at the moment of sale to the cooperative. The cooperative is therefore responsible for withholding and collecting the Funrural contribution; the amount is deducted from payments made to associated family farmers, and this legal rule assigns responsibility to the purchaser of rural production. The coordinator further explained that, in practice, Funrural consists of the provision of social security benefits such as rural old-age retirement, with a reduced retirement age (55 for women and 60 for men), conditional on proof of at least 15 years of rural work; disability retirement, intended for workers permanently incapacitated for work; sickness benefit, paid to insured persons temporarily unable to work due to illness or accident; rural maternity benefit, granted to special insured

women (whether through childbirth or adoption) for 120 days; survivors' pension, paid to dependents in the event of the rural producer's death, equivalent to the value of the retirement benefit; and accident benefit, paid after the consolidation of injuries resulting from accidents of any nature.

Funrural emerged in the 1960s with the Rural Workers' Statute (Law No. 4.214/1963). In 1969, Decree-Law No. 564 extended to rural workers the social security protection previously reserved only for urban workers. Subsequently, Decree No. 65.106/1969 regulated rural social security and created a basic assistance plan.

In this context, the basic rural social security plan was replaced by an autonomous regime complementary to the Rural Worker Assistance Program (Pró-rural), created by Complementary Law No. 11 of 1971. Maintained and administered by Funrural, the program consisted in the provision of certain benefits to rural workers and their dependents, including, under Article 2 of the complementary law, old-age retirement, disability retirement, pensions, funeral assistance, health services, and social services. It was, in effect, a social security and assistance regime associated with the principles of decent work as social security and social protection.

In the rural economy, there are four main contributors to Social Security, all inserted into the unified regime applied to urban and rural workers: the special insured, the rural employer as an individual, the rural employer as a legal entity, and agro-industry. Paragraph 8 of Article 195 of the Federal Constitution defines how the social security contribution of the special insured rural producer—who works in a family economy and without employees—is to be collected.

> The producer, partner, sharecropper, tenant farmer, and artisanal fisher, as well as their respective spouses, who carry out their activities under a family economy regime, without permanent employees, shall contribute to social security through the application of a rate on the proceeds of the commercialization of production and shall be entitled to benefits under the terms of the law (BRASIL, 1988).

There are ongoing discussions regarding the expansion of this model to artisans linked to the solidarity economy in Brazil. Because farmers do not contribute to social security through monthly payments, as urban workers do, their contribution is tied to the commercialization of their production. Thus, when the special insured person sells production to a cooperative or purchasing firm, that entity withholds a rate on the gross value of the invoice, which is then transferred to Social Security (INSS).

5. Conclusion

This article examined the process of the social construction of the solidarity economy in Brazil through the experience of decentralized cooperatives in family farming.

Based on the approach of economic sociology, it sought to demonstrate that markets do not constitute autonomous spheres governed exclusively by mechanisms of supply and demand, but rather emerge from social and institutional processes that shape both economic dynamics and labor relations, as well as social protection mechanisms. In this context, the article argued that the solidarity economy, structured through decentralized cooperatives, has the potential to foster forms of productive insertion grounded in cooperation, social dialogue, and the expansion of decent work conditions.

The theoretical analysis showed that the solidarity economy may be understood as an expression of plural economic forms, in which principles such as reciprocity, cooperation, and redistribution coexist with market mechanisms. Drawing on contributions from economic sociology and substantive economic thought, particularly the reflections of Karl Polanyi and Latin American authors such as Coraggio, Quijano, and Razeto, it was possible to situate the solidarity economy as an institutional and socially constructed alternative for confronting processes of exclusion and labor precarization.

At the empirical level, the study highlighted the role of decentralized family farming cooperatives as organizational arrangements capable of articulating production, commercialization, and access to public policies. The analysis of the experience of Cooperativa Familiar Nova Vida showed that these organizations play a relevant role in enabling family farmers to access institutional markets, such as the National School Feeding Program (PNAE), as well as in mediating social protection mechanisms associated with rural social security. In this sense, the collection of social security contributions through Funrural constitutes an important element of social protection for rural workers linked to cooperatives, contributing to the materialization of principles associated with decent work.

The results indicate that decentralized cooperatives operate as spaces of economic and social articulation that allow family farmers to expand their possibilities of market insertion, while at the same time preserving a certain degree of productive autonomy and strengthening cooperative relations among members. Such organizational arrangements demonstrate that markets may be constructed through collective and institutionally mediated logics, in which public policies, cooperative networks, and social values play a fundamental role.

Nevertheless, decentralized cooperatives represent only one dimension of the broader solidarity economy movement in Brazil. Future research may deepen the analysis of other organizational experiences, especially in urban contexts, as well as investigate more systematically the impacts of these initiatives on labor formalization, the expansion of social protection, and the construction of socially oriented markets. In this way, the field of economic sociology finds in the solidarity economy a fertile terrain for understanding the multiple ways in which economic activity is structured by social relations, institutions, and

values that transcend a strictly market-oriented logic.

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