

The promotion of both decent and green jobs through cooperatives*

(La promoción de empleos verdes y decentes a través de cooperativas)

Josune López Rodríguez¹
University of Deusto (Spain)

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Abstract: Nowadays, it is undeniable that continuous environmental degradation and climate change threaten the sustainability of the planet. As a consequence, there is an urgent need to face these menaces and to promote sustainable development. From this starting point, this paper aims to show how cooperatives can be a useful channel to promote green and decent jobs. In order to achieve this objective, first of all, we will analyse the conceptual scope of green and decent jobs. Secondly, we will highlight the

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¹ Lecturer of Law and member of the 'Cooperativism, taxation, promotion, labour relations and social protection' research group. E-mail: josunelopezrodriguez@deusto.es

meaning of cooperatives, paying special attention to cooperative values and principles. Thirdly, we will proceed to explain how cooperatives can contribute to encourage green and decent jobs. And, lastly, we will enumerate the main conclusions.

Keywords: Green jobs; decent work; cooperatives; sustainable development.

Resumen: En la actualidad, resulta innegable que la constante degradación medioambiental y el cambio climático amenazan la sostenibilidad del planeta. Como consecuencia, existe una necesidad urgente de afrontar estas amenazas y de promover el desarrollo sostenible. A partir de estas premisas, el presente artículo tiene por objeto mostrar cómo las cooperativas pueden ser una vía útil para promover los empleos verdes y decentes. Para lograr este objetivo, en primer lugar, se analizará el alcance conceptual de los empleos verdes y decentes. En segundo lugar, se resaltarán el concepto de las cooperativas, prestando especial atención a los valores y principios cooperativos. En tercer lugar, se procederá a explicar cómo pueden las cooperativas contribuir a la promoción de empleos verdes y decentes. En último lugar, se enumerarán las principales conclusiones.

Palabras clave: Empleo verde; trabajo decente; cooperativas; desarrollo sostenible.

'La historia, como el trigo, ha llenado con sus acontecimientos los trojes de la memoria.

Es hora de hacer el pan para alimentar el futuro'

'History, like wheat, has filled the granaries of memory with its events.

It is time to make bread to feed the future'

(José Antonio Marina and María de la Válgoma, *La lucha por la dignidad*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2008, page 293)

I. Introduction

According to the International Labour Organisation, two of the most important challenges of the 21st century, namely preserving the environment and turning decent work into a reality, must be addressed jointly given their close relationship.² The incessant environmental degradation and the global deficit of decent jobs are incontestable facts that seriously threaten the sustainability of the planet.

Spain is no stranger to these global challenges. It has been clearly shown that the effects of climate change are not only limited to the environment but also influence the social and economic spheres. In addition, the precariousness that currently characterises the Spanish job market only aggravates social inequalities and increases poverty.

This alarming scenario requires the adoption and implementation of effective strategies aimed at ensuring sustainable development 'that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'³ Specifically, sustainable development must be based on three mutually interdependent pillars, namely environmental protection, social development and economic growth.

Both international and European organisations have highlighted the urgent need to foster a transition towards socially just, green economies, focused on meeting social needs and preserving the environment. In this transition, it has been acknowledged that there is a duty

² INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (2013, page 1).

³ Report from the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 4 August, 1987 (Chapter II, paragraph 1).

to promote green and decent jobs that contribute to effective sustainable development in its triple environmental, social and economic dimensions. This challenge necessarily involves a duty to coordinate employment and environmental policies.

Starting from these premises, this study's objective is to verify whether cooperatives, as part of the Social Economy, are suitable and useful organisations for the promotion of green and decent jobs. To this end, first, the meaning of green employment and decent work will be examined and the correlation between both concepts will be addressed. This will be followed by a definition of cooperatives, emphasising their cooperative values and principles. Once this conceptual framework has been established, the role of cooperatives as promoters of green and decent jobs will be analysed and assessed. This analysis will be based on the relevant international and European regulations and subsequently, reference will be made to Spanish regulations. Finally, the main conclusions of the study will be presented.

II. Green and decent jobs: towards sustainable development

Employment is an essential factor in supporting the transition towards fair and green economies.⁴ However, this statement needs qualifying, since not all employment is optimal for ensuring sustainable development. According to international bodies, green and decent jobs can effectively contribute to achieving sustainability, so it is necessary to gain further insight into their meaning.

2.1. Green jobs

Broadly speaking, the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Labour Organisation, the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organisation of Employers all define green jobs as jobs that 'reduce the environmental impact of enterprises and economic sectors, ultimately to levels that are sustainable'.⁵

More specifically, international organisations explain that green jobs, which can be found in different sectors of the economy, 'play a crucial role in reducing the environmental footprint of economic

⁴ *Vid.* GIL, GIL, JL (2017, page 31) and MOLINA NAVARRETE, C. (2013, page 277).

⁵ UNEP, ILO, IOE and ITUC (2008, page 5).

activity'.⁶ Specifically, but not exclusively, this includes jobs that 'help to cut the consumption of energy, raw materials and water through high-efficiency strategies, to de-carbonize the economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to minimize or avoid altogether all forms of waste and pollution, to protect and restore ecosystems and biodiversity'.⁷ However, international organisations have noted that the decrease of the environmental impact is progressive, so jobs can contribute in different ways to the reduction of the environmental footprint depending on the specific nature of each job. Therefore, it has been recognised that the notion of green job does not have an absolute or categorical character, but rather it is a concept that is continually being constructed and that will evolve over time. In view of the incipient nature of the concept, international bodies maintain that it contains different 'shades'⁸ of green.

It should be noted, however, that this notion does not objectively identify the specific requirements for a job to qualify as 'green'; instead, it specifies the scope of this type of job based on the external appearance adopted by it.⁹ It seems that this concept, rather than defining green work as such, refers to what a 'green company', that is, a non-polluting company, is.¹⁰

2.2. Decent work

The term 'decent work'¹¹ was defined for the first time in the Report of the Director-General of the ILO to the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1999. In general terms, it refers to 'productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity, in which rights are protected and which has adequate remuneration and social protection'.¹²

The constitutional mandate of the International Labour Organisation is fundamentally based on the concept of decent work. It essentially includes the promotion of employment, the protection of rights at work, the extension of social protection, the promotion of social di-

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ ARIAS DOMÍNGUEZ, Á. (2013, page 124).

¹⁰ CAHALE CARRILLO, D.T. (2017, page 6).

¹¹ For more *vid.* ARELLANO ORTÍZ, P.A. (2014, pages 2065-2067).

¹² BAYLOS GRAU, A.P. (2016, page 307) and GHAI, D. (2003, page 125).

alogue, and respect for equal opportunities and treatment for women and men.¹³

2.3. *Synergy needed between green jobs and decent work.*

On the basis of the above, it should be noted that a job classified as 'green' does not *per se* constitute decent work, and that decent work is not automatically a green job.¹⁴ In effect, a job can be green and decent at the same time, but a green job may not be regarded as being decent. Moreover, a decent work may not be green, and a job may be neither green nor decent.

In light of these assumptions, it can be inferred that green jobs that contravene decent work standards and decent jobs that do not encompass environmental criteria are not suitable for achieving sustainable development.¹⁵ In order to guarantee truly sustainable development, it is essential to combine the notions of green jobs and decent work.

In this way, green employment and decent work should not be conceived as independent concepts but as inseparable notions. Their meaning needs to be reformulated and merged in such a way that green and decent work is understood as any provision of services carried out in decent conditions and has environmental sustainability as a principle of action.¹⁶ The aspiration should therefore be for all jobs to be both green and decent.¹⁷

III. **A conceptual approach to cooperatives, particularly to cooperative values and principles**

Broadly speaking, the literature has considered cooperatives to be 'the epitome of companies and employers in the Social Economy'¹⁸ and, even, as the 'main exponent of the Social Economy'.¹⁹

¹³ GIL AND GIL, J.L. (2017, page 3)

¹⁴ ÁLVAREZ CUESTA, H. (2016, page 26).

¹⁵ On this question, see PÉREZ AMORÓS, F. (2010, page 111).

¹⁶ ÁLVAREZ CUESTA, H. (2017, page 275).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ PANIAGUA ZURERA, M. (2011, page 167).

¹⁹ MORGADO PANADERO, P. (2006, page 40). For other similar descriptions, see ARIETA IDIAKEZ, FJ (2014, page 43) and BAREA, J. and MONZÓN, JL (1995, page 141).

In particular, the Declaration of the International Cooperative Alliance on Cooperative Identity, adopted in 1995, defines a cooperative as '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'. In the Spanish legal sphere, Law 27/1999, of 16 July, on Cooperatives,²⁰ establishes that a cooperative is 'an undertaking composed of people who become associated on the basis of free and voluntary membership and departure, to carry out business activities aimed at meeting their needs and economic and social aspirations, with a democratic structure and way of operating' (see Article 1.1.). These organisations are therefore characterised by the fact 'that a group of people share one or several needs and decide to satisfy them directly by themselves, regardless of the various opportunities that the environment in which they live may provide them, through an economic undertaking'.²¹

In addition, the Declaration of the International Cooperative Alliance establishes a series of operational and ethical values that should govern the actions of cooperatives and their members.²² Specifically, 'cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, personal responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity' and 'the partners who are members of the cooperative believe in the ethical values of honesty, transparency, social responsibility and concern for others'.

To put these values into practice, cooperatives must necessarily comply with the seven principles included in the Declaration on Cooperative Identity, namely: (1) voluntary and open membership; (2) democratic member control; (3) member economic participation; (4) autonomy and independence; (5) education, training and information; (6) cooperation among cooperatives; and (7) concern for the community.²³ The principles listed cannot be considered independently, but must be interrelated and interpreted comprehensively.²⁴

In short, the daily work of cooperatives must be based on respect for and compliance with cooperative values and principles.²⁵

²⁰ Spanish Official Gazette (BOE) of 17 July, 1999, no. 170.

²¹ MARTÍNEZ CHARTERINA, A. (2015, page 107).

²² For more on this topic, see CENDÓN TORRES, R. (2014, page 437) and MARTÍNEZ CHARTERINA, A. (1995, pages 43-45).

²³ In this regard see, *vid.* MORGADO PANADERO, P. (2006, pages 43-45).

²⁴ In line with this question, see GADEA, E., SACRISTAN, F. and VARGAS VASSEROT, C. (2009, page 43).

²⁵ ATXABAL RADA, A. (2015, page 168).

IV. Cooperatives as suitable organisations for the promotion of green and decent jobs

At the international level, the International Labour Organisation Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation, adopted on 10 June, 2008, established that a solid Social Economy is essential for the promotion of economic development and sustainable job opportunities. Similarly, the Global Jobs Pact, adopted by the International Labour Conference on 19 June, 2009, underlined the importance of cooperation in supporting the shift to an environmentally-friendly economy and to make decent work a reality (see paragraph 21.3). Likewise, Recommendation No. 193 of the International Labour Organisation on the promotion of cooperatives of 20 June, 2002, highlighted the importance of cooperatives in the creation of jobs and the promotion of sustainable development. For its part, the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 27 July, 2012, on 'The future we want', which emphasised the need to promote an economic, social and environmentally sustainable future, stressed the significant contribution of cooperatives combatting social inclusion and reducing poverty (see paragraph 70). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, approved by the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 September, 2015, which similarly included 17 objectives for achieving sustainable development based on the harmonisation of social justice, environmental sustainability and economic progress, expressly recognised the work of cooperatives in achieving those objectives (see paragraph 41).²⁶

In the context of the European Union, the Treaty of Lisbon, amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed on 13 December 2007,²⁷ mentions the promotion of sustainable development as a specific purpose of the European Union. Similarly, Article 37 of the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights²⁸ provides that a high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment must be integrated into the policies of the Union. In this vein, the so-called 'Europe 2020: A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' adopted in the Communication issued by the European Commission on 3 March, 2010,²⁹ emphasised the need to foster the tran-

²⁶ INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (2018, page 1)

²⁷ OJEU of 17 December, 2007, C 306.

²⁸ OJEU 7 June, 2016, C 202.

²⁹ COM (2010) 2020 final.

sition towards greener, fairer and more inclusive economies. To help achieve the aims set out in the Strategy, on the one hand, Council Decision 2010/707/EU of 21 October 2010, on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States,³⁰ urged the Union and the Member States to stimulate the creation of green jobs; and, on the other hand, the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'Green Employment Initiative: Tapping into the job creation potential of the green economy', adopted on 2 July, 2014,³¹ highlighted the important role of the labour market in achieving sustainable development and, more specifically, recognised the potential of the Social Economy and social enterprises. Likewise, in the European Parliament Resolution of 8 July 2015 on the 'Green Employment Initiative: making the most of the job creation potential of the green economy', the Commission was encouraged to stimulate new business models to increase the efficiency of production and distribution processes, explicitly referring to cooperative enterprises (see paragraph 84). Recently, the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'The transition towards a more sustainable European future: a strategy for 2050', adopted on 17 October, 2017,³² reaffirmed the need to strengthen the links between economic development, environmental protection and social policies, and referred to cooperatism as an appropriate business concept for confronting three fundamental challenges, namely, the depletion of the earth's natural resources, social inequalities and public loss of trust in government (see section 4.1). However, it is paradoxical that the recently proclaimed 'European Pillar of Social Rights', on the basis of Commission Recommendation (EU) 2017/761, of 26 April 2017, merely briefly mentions the Union's objective to act in favour of sustainable development and does not contemplate any provision on the transition to fairer and greener economies and the promotion of green and decent work.³³

As far as the Spanish legal system is concerned, the Spanish Constitution³⁴ stipulates the duty of public authorities to ensure the rational use of all natural resources, in order to protect and improve the quality of life and protect and restore the environment, relying on collective solidarity (see Article 45.2). Article 129.2 of the Spanish Constitution

³⁰ OJEU 24 November, 2010, L 308.

³¹ COM (2014) 446 final.

³² OJEU March 2, 2018, C 81.

³³ For more on this topic, see OLMO GASCÓN, AM (2017, pages 60-64).

³⁴ BOE 29 December, 1978, no. 311

requires that the public authorities promote cooperative undertakings. In connection with these constitutional mandates, Law 5/2011, of 29 March, on Social Economy,³⁵ established that Social Economy is a precursor of, and is committed to, the threefold economic model of sustainable development, which covers economic, social and environmental aspects. Under Law 5/2011, cooperatives, like the other organisations in the Social Economy, must comply with a number of guiding principles, notably including the commitment to local development and the generation of stable and high-quality employment (see Article 4). Spain's Activation for Employment Strategy 2017-2020, approved by Royal Decree 1032/2017, of 15 December,³⁶ also has the promotion of the Social Economy as a model of collective entrepreneurship among its structural objectives.

These declarations lead to the conclusion that the Social Economy in general, and cooperatives in particular, are suitable means to face the challenges concerning the preservation of the environment and turning decent work into a reality, ultimately fostering sustainable development.³⁷

The defence and the application of the principles of solidarity and responsibility, and the use of surpluses for the achievement of sustainable development are the main defining features of the Social Economy. They make it a suitable model to meet the challenges of the global society, the environment and the economy, including the need to promote a just transition towards a sustainable economy and sustainable forms of employment.³⁸

In the context of the Social Economy, cooperative values and principles show that sustainability is part of a cooperative's identity.³⁹ In effect, these values and principles lead cooperatives 'to have a constant concern and care for their surroundings, both for the people and for the environment where they are located and work'.⁴⁰ As they are based on cooperative values and principles, cooperatives are considered to be appropriate and useful undertakings for the promotion of sustainable development through the creation of green and decent

³⁵ BOE 30 March, 2011, no. 76

³⁶ BOE 16 December, 2017, no. 305

³⁷ HIEZ, D. (2008, page 380); PUENTES POYATOS, R. and VELASCO GÁMEZ, M.M. (2009, page 111); and ROCHA SÁNCHEZ, F. (2014, page 794).

³⁸ MOLINA NAVARRETE, C. (2013, page 287). Also *vid.* MORGADO PANADERO, P. (2006, page 38).

³⁹ For further information, see DE MIRANDA, J.E. et al. (2010, pages 25-27) and GARCÍA, J., VÍA, J. and XIRINACS, LM (2006, pages 210-211).

⁴⁰ MARTÍNEZ CHARTERINA, A. (2013, page 196).

jobs. In order to achieve this, the second cooperative principle (which concerns the democratic control by the members), and the seventh cooperative principle (having a concern for the community), are particularly important.

Accordance to the second cooperative principle, cooperatives are organisations that are democratically managed by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and in decision-making. Specifically, this principle recognises the right of the members to be involved in the design of policies and decision making, which are essential assumptions in supporting initiatives aimed at creating green and decent jobs.

As stated in the seventh cooperative principle, cooperatives work to achieve the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members. In reality, this principle reflects the responsibility that cooperatives have for the community where they are based, for the workers, and for the environment.⁴¹ In other words, this characteristic feature of cooperatives reveals their 'ecosocial awareness'⁴², that is, their concern for local development, social cohesion and sustainability.⁴³ Moreover, the commitment that cooperatives make to the community not only has effects at a local level, but also has global impact.⁴⁴

The combination of both cooperative principles simultaneously establishes a right/duty of cooperative members which is of specially importance in the creation of green and decent jobs. Members have the obligation to adopt policies aimed at fostering environmental development, generating green and decent jobs and preserving the environment.⁴⁵

In view of the above, it must be concluded that cooperatives, as part of the Social Economy, are suitable organisations to promote green and decent work. However, this conclusion should be qualified, as cooperatives 'are not, by themselves, a panacea'.⁴⁶ There are different factors that can hinder and prevent the effective achievement of these objectives and must be taken into account when designing policies or strategies. These may include scarce resources, financing diffi-

⁴¹ CARRASCO, I. (2007, p.459); FICI, A. (2013, page 45); and MORILLAS JARRILLO, MJ (2013, page 131).

⁴² GARCÍA, J., VÍA, J. and XIRINACS, LM (2006, page 151).

⁴³ ÁLVAREZ CUESTA, H. (2016, page 82).

⁴⁴ PUENTES POYATOS, R. and VELASCO GÁMEZ, MM (2009, pages 111-112).

⁴⁵ GARCÍA, J., VÍA, J. and XIRINACS, L.M. (2006, page 152).

⁴⁶ MOLINA NAVARRETE, C. (2013, page 287).

culties, deficit in management, decisional difficulty, atomisation, mimicking of conventional business, lack of the self-esteem among the members, lack of visibility of social aspects and lack of adequate communication, among others.⁴⁷

V. Conclusions

The main conclusions of this study are:

1. The two main challenges of the 21st century, that is, protecting the environment and turning decent work into a reality, demand the adoption of policies and strategies that jointly address environmental and socio-labour issues. Ultimately, these measures should be aimed at guaranteeing sustainable development regarding three aspects: environmental, social and economic.
2. Achieving sustainable development requires rethinking and reformulating the current economic model and promoting a transition towards socially just and green economies.
3. Green and decent work, that is, environmentally sustainable employment that respect the standards of decent work, is fundamental in fostering the transition to fair and green economies.
4. Within the Social Economy model, cooperative values and principles reveal the commitment of cooperatives to the community, to workers and to the environment, which makes them ideal undertakings for the creation of green and decent jobs and the promotion of sustainable development.
5. The extent to which cooperatives manage to achieve these objectives depends on the involvement of their members. Therefore, their active participation in the policy design and decision-making on the matter is essential.
6. The daily problems faced by cooperatives may hinder their contribution to sustainable development. This may ultimately lead to questioning their work as agents of change. Consequently, it is necessary to pay attention to the specific problems concerning cooperatives.

⁴⁷ GARCÍA, J., VÍA, J. and XIRINACS, L.M. (2006, pages 152-163) and MOLINA NAVARRETE, C. (2013, page 287).

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