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# SOCIAL AND RELATIONAL VARIABLES IN COOPERATIVES

Marina Albanese\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Naples – Italie

## Résumé

Recent economic literature has focused on the influence of a good working climate and the mutual support of workers in the production processes showing that, if we include relational and social variables in the economic analysis of the enterprise, the efficiency of production and the surplus level can change. At the same time, the recent global economic crisis caused a strong instability throughout the world. Cooperative firms have reportedly been strikingly resilient to the crisis in different parts of the world. In particular, Alves, Burdin and Dean (2016) recently highlights that labour managed firms display a more resilient employment dynamic than analogous investor owned firms, both in terms of job creation and destruction. Since workers are reported to value strongly employment stability (Guest, 2002; Depedri, Carpita and Tortia, 2012), increased stability would correspond, *ceteris paribus*, to increased worker welfare, which can translate into lower absenteeism and turnover, and into increased productivity. Burdin and Dean (2009) consider the economy wide comparison between worker cooperatives and conventional enterprises in Uruguay in the decade spanning from 1996 to 2005 and they find substantially more pronounced variation in wages in cooperatives. The stark difference in wage dynamics is explained by the necessity for cooperatives to preserve stable employment in the face of economic fluctuation and crisis, which, in this country, started in 2001. Moreover, Arando et al. (2010) show much better performance in employment creation and preservation in the Mondragon group of worker cooperatives, than the average of the whole Spanish economy in the period 1983-2009, both inside and outside the Basque Region where the group is located. Cooperatives showed better than average propensity to create, but not to reduce employment. The 2012 CECOP (Roelants et al, 2012) report confirms the high level of cooperative resilience to the financial and economic crisis. Focusing on France and Spain, the report argues that, although cooperatives have not been spared by the crisis, they have been able to limit firm closures and lay-offs better than the average business, in some cases even restoring a job creation pattern. This suggests that, although these enterprises have not been spared by the crisis, they have been able to limit enterprise closures and job losses better than the average business. The stabilization of employment can be analyzed in two perspectives: individual: employment insurance as opposed to wage insurance (Albanese, Navarra and Tortia, 2015; Miyazaki and Neary, 1983); social: the presence of relational and social norms in worker cooperatives, where people live and work all during their life, could be the explanation of the resilience of the cooperative model during crisis. Starting by this approach, the paper investigates as coordination mechanisms in firms can favour social and economic objectives of the firm. In particular, in cooperatives people are the owners of the firm and can decide for social aspect preservation. This means that in the maximization processes, the objective function

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\*Intervenant

of cooperatives is, very complex as it is partly lucrative (and this is shared by the investor owned enterprise) and in part social (typical of the cooperative enterprise) (Zamagni and Zamagni, 2008). The historical and economic condition determines the dominance of the first or the second part. This can explain the resilience of the cooperative model during crisis.

**Mots-Clés:** worker, owned enterprises, social capital, relational goods, economic crisis, resilience