Türkiye Kooperatifçiliğinde Güncel Konular ve Geleceğe Yönelik Eğilimler: 2025 Perspektifi
Current Issues and Future Trends in Turkish Cooperativism: The 2025 Perspective

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Özet

Kooperatifçilik, ekonomik kalkınmanın yanısıra sosyal dayanışma ve sürdürülebilirliğin de temel araçlarından biri haline gelmiştir. Dünya genelinde sosyal ekonomi yaklaşımı içerisinde kooperatifçilik anlayışı yeniden önem kazanmakla birlikte; ekonomik işletme modelinden öte, toplumsal fayda üreten bir yapıya dönüşmektedir. Türkiye'de kooperatifçilik hareketi köklü bir geçmişe sahip olmakla birlikte, son yıllarda kadın girişimciliği, sürdürülebilir ve etik üretim, sosyal inovasyon gibi temalar etrafında yeniden şekillenmektedir. Birleşmiş Milletler tarafından 2025 yılının Uluslararası Kooperatifler Yılı ilan edilmesi, bu alandaki farkındalığı arttırmış ve ülkeleri kooperatifçilik anlayışlarını yeniden değerlendirmeye teşvik etmiştir. Türkiye'de son dönemde yapılan çalışmalar; kooperatiflerin sadece ekonomik birer işletme olmadığını, sosyal refahın, yerel kalkınmanın ve toplumsal dayanışmanın aktörleri olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de kooperatifçiliğin mevcut durumunu ve geleceğe yönelik eğilimlerini güncel literatür ışığında değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Literatürde öne çıkan eğilimler 2025 perspektifinde Türkiye'de kooperatifçiliğin geleceğinde dijital dönüşümün hızlanması, sosyal ekonomi politikalarının güçlendirilmesi ve kadın ile gençlerin kooperatif süreçlerine daha aktif katılımı gibi dinamiklerin belirleyici olacağını ortaya koymaktadır. Derleme sonucunda kooperatifçiliğin Türkiye'de sadece üretim ilişkilerinin değil, dayanışma kültürünün ve sosyal kalkınma anlayışının yeniden biçimlenmesinde de stratejik bir rol üstlendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Kooperatiflerin etkinliğini arttırmak için eğitim, dijital kapasite geliştirme, ulusal ve uluslararası ağ oluşturma ve sosyal etki ölçüm sistemlerinin güçlendirilmesi yönünde politikalar geliştirilmesi önerilmektedir. Böylece kooperatifler, Türkiye'nin sürdürülebilir kalkınma hedeflerine ulaşmasında hem ekonomik hem toplumsal bir kaldıraç görevi görebilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kooperatifçilik, Sosyal Ekonomi, CIRIEC, Sürdürülebilirlik

JEL Kodları: P13, Q56, L31

Abstract

Cooperatives have become a fundamental tool for social sustainability and sustainability, as well as economic development. Within the global social economy approach, the concept of cooperatives is gaining renewed importance; it is evolving beyond an economic business model into a structure that generates social benefit. While the cooperative movement in Turkiye has a long history, it has recently been reshaped around themes such as women's entrepreneurship, sustainable and productive ethics, and social innovation. The declaration of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives by the United Nations has increased the number of cooperatives in this region and encouraged countries to re-evaluate their understanding of cooperatives. Recent studies in Türkiye demonstrate that cooperatives are not merely economic enterprises but also agents of social welfare, local development, and social solidarity. This study aims to evaluate the current and future trends of cooperatives in Türkiye, along with current literature reviews. The literature reveals that the future of cooperatives in Türkiye, with a 2025 market perspective, is fragmented, with dynamics such as the acceleration of digital capacity, a focus on social economic policies, and a more active participation of women's and youth cooperatives. The review reveals that cooperatives in Türkiye play a productive role in reshaping not only production relations but also a culture of solidarity and the understanding of social development. For cooperatives to be paid, policies must be developed to address training, digital capacity building, national and international networking, and the output of social impact measurement results. Thus, Türkiye's sustainable development will be able to undertake both economic and social responsibilities when it achieves its goals.

Keywords: Cooperatives, Social Economy, CIRIEC, Sustainability

JEL Codes: P13, Q56, L31

Introduction

Cooperatives have transcended traditional economic structures and become one of the fundamental tools for economic development, as well as social solidarity, ethical production, and sustainability. Particularly in recent years, within the rising global social economy approach, the concept of cooperatives has regained importance; it has transformed from an economic business model to a structure that generates social benefit and prosperity. This paradigm shift demonstrates that cooperatives are actors that respond not only to the needs of their members but also to the needs of their communities and society as a whole.

One of the most concrete indicators of this international interest is the United Nations' (UN) declaration of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives. This declaration has raised global awareness and encouraged countries to review their cooperative policies and practices. For Turkiye, this perspective presents a significant opportunity for the long-established cooperative movement to reshape and assume a strategic role.

While the cooperative movement in Turkiye has operated across a wide range of sectors since its inception, from agriculture and housing to transportation and consumption, it has recently been rapidly gaining a new identity, particularly around themes such as women's

entrepreneurship, social innovation, and sustainable/ethical production. Recent studies clearly demonstrate that cooperatives are actors of local development and social solidarity. In this context, platforms such as the workshops organized by CIRIEC (International Centre of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy) Turkiye play a critical role in identifying the sector's current status and future needs.

The primary objective of this study is to assess the current status and future trends of cooperatives in Turkiye, particularly in light of current literature, within the context of the UN's 2025 International Year of Cooperatives. Beyond simply being economic enterprises, the study aims to emphasize the strategic role of cooperatives in rebuilding social welfare and a culture of solidarity.

The study begins by considering the place of cooperatives within the social economy and then examines the new generation's understanding of cooperatives and the increasing participation of women and youth. In the next section, current developments in the axis of digital transformation, social innovation and sustainability will be evaluated and finally, strategic trends for the future of cooperatives in Turkiye in the perspective of 2025 and policy recommendations supported by the results of the CIRIEC TurkiyeWorkshop will be presented.

1. Cooperatives: A Tool for Social Economy and Social Benefit

The definition and function of cooperatives have undergone a significant transformation in recent years in response to the inequalities and social exclusion brought about by the classical capitalist economic model. Cooperatives are institutions based on the principles of self-help, solidarity, and democratic participation, and conduct their economic activities in accordance with ethical values (Kılıç & Aydoğan, 2022). This transformation places cooperatives directly under the umbrella of the Social Economy.

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) defines a cooperative as "a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise by individuals who come together voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs." This framework explains the centrality of cooperatives within the Social Economy (Zeuli, K. A. et al. 2004). Cooperatives represent not only the economic but also the ethical and solidarity aspects of the social economy; they play an active role in ensuring social justice (Kılıç & Aydoğan, 2022).

The role of cooperatives in the production of social benefits can be examined in three fundamental dimensions:

1.1. Economic Justice and Inclusion

Democratic management and the principle of fairness in revenue sharing are the fundamental characteristics that distinguish cooperatives from traditional enterprises (Kılıç & Aydoğan, 2022). This model enables small producers, farmers, and disadvantaged groups to increase their market power, compete, and participate in economic processes. The principle of inclusiveness also makes cooperatives a space for social security and production for groups excluded from traditional employment markets. The strategic role of cooperatives in the context of inclusive growth and social cohesion, along with their contribution to sustainable development, is particularly emphasized in globalization debates (Bretos & Marcuello, 2017). Cooperative operations offer a participatory and locally based way to combat poverty by collectively

strengthening the economic, human, and social capital of their members (Majee, W., & Hoyt, A., 2011).

1.2. Local Development and Social Solidarity

By strengthening local production and consumption cycles and ensuring the continuity of regional prosperity, cooperatives play a strategic role, particularly in rural development (Kılıç & Aydoğan, 2022). Cooperatives create employment, strengthen local capital accumulation, and form the institutional backbone of local development by deepening trust and networks among members (Majee, W., & Hoyt, A., 2011). Furthermore, cooperatives build a strong culture of solidarity among members. This solidarity creates a social resilience mechanism not only in economic hardship but also in situations such as natural disasters or social crises. The social foundations of cooperatives in Turkiye are based on solidarity practices such as the Ahi order and collective work culture (Kılıç & Aydoğan, 2022). International literature demonstrates that cooperatives are unique organizations that strengthen social welfare and social harmony and can play a complementary role in the public service ecosystem (Bretos and Marcuello, 2017).

1.3. Cooperatives as Actors of Social Welfare

International literature demonstrates that cooperatives are unique organizations that strengthen social welfare and social cohesion and can play a complementary role within the public service ecosystem (Bretos and Marcuello, 2017). By facilitating access to social services, cooperatives increase the well-being of disadvantaged groups in particular and strengthen social inclusion (Kılıç & Aydoğan, 2022). This finding confirms the potential of cooperatives in supporting public services and providing social services, as highlighted in the CIRIEC Turkiye Workshop Report (CIRIEC Turkiye, 2025).

In conclusion, cooperatives are not merely an economic form of organization; they are also an inclusive, ethical, and social benefit-oriented development model that implements the fundamental principles of social economy.

2. New Generation Cooperative Understanding and Dynamics in Turkiye

Despite its deep-rooted history, the cooperative movement in Turkiye has undergone a significant transformation to meet the social and economic needs of the 21st century. New-Generation Cooperativism, unlike traditional cooperatives, represents more flexible, innovative, and multi-stakeholder structures that prioritize not only economic activities but also social and environmental objectives. This approach aligns with the notion that cooperatives are not merely an economic tool but also an active element in building social justice and prosperity, as stated by Kılıç & Aydoğan (2022). Furthermore, the values of self-help, democracy, equality, and solidarity inherent in cooperatives (Çikın & Karacan, 1994) are being reinterpreted with sustainability principles in new-generation practices. These organizations, which define themselves as "new generation," generally tend to address social problems, embrace ethical and sustainable production principles, and exhibit a more democratic, non-hierarchical management approach. New Generation Cooperatives (NGCs) feature innovative regulations such as tying capital contributions to the right of delivery, while fundamental democratic principles such as

"one member, one vote" and profit sharing based on patronage are preserved (Harris, A., et al., 1996).

In Turkiye, this new approach is particularly embodied around three main dynamics:

2.1. Cooperatives as a Tool for Women's Entrepreneurship and Empowerment

Women's cooperatives can be said to have gained the strongest momentum in Turkiye over the last decade. Kılıç & Aydoğan (2022) emphasize the effective role of cooperatives in accessing social services, combating poverty, and fostering social solidarity. These findings support the fact that women's cooperatives focus not only on production but also on social welfare and empowerment. Cooperatives directly contribute to women's economic and social empowerment through their capacity to educate their members and collectively address community-based needs (Majee, W., & Hoyt, A., 2011).

- Multifaceted Benefits: Women's cooperatives contribute to the economic cycle through the products they produce (food, handicrafts, services), while also enabling the joint resolution of social needs such as childcare, education, and healthcare.

- Institutional Support: The institutional capacity of women's cooperatives is strengthened through financial and technical support (training, digital infrastructure, marketing) provided by public institutions, local governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

2.2. Youth Participation in Decision-Making Processes and New Employment Models

New-generation cooperatives offer an attractive organizational model, especially for the young population. The precariousness of traditional employment conditions and the lack of participation in decision-making processes are driving young people to see cooperatives as a partnership and a secure employment opportunity. It has been found that young people in Turkiye are more interested in cooperative training, with 61% of cooperative members requesting training (Everest, B. Et al. 2019).

Democratic Participation: The "one person, one vote" principle ensures the active participation of young professionals and innovative ideators in decision-making processes, regardless of their shareholding.

Service Cooperatives: Young people are creating a new dynamic by opting for cooperatives in service sectors such as IT, design, culture and arts, and the environment, rather than agriculture. These cooperatives strive to create a new network by collaborating with other components of the social solidarity economy (social enterprises and associations).

2.3. Focus on Sustainability and Ethical Production

As business models aligned with the goals of sustainable economic development and social cohesion, cooperatives offer an alternative institutional path that supports environmental and ethical standards in the context of current globalization (Bretos & Marcuello, 2017). Approaches such as preventing food waste, using environmentally friendly production methods, and preserving local seeds, along with increased consumer awareness, support the market success of these cooperatives.

In Turkiye, the new generation of cooperatives, led by women and youth, prioritizes social objectives over economic activity, playing a strategic role in reshaping social welfare and local development. This transformation once again highlights the importance of social innovation and digitalization, which are shaping the future of cooperatives.

3. Cooperatives in the Axis of Social Innovation, Digital Transformation and Sustainability

The new generation of cooperatives not only distinguishes itself from traditional production models but also increases its effectiveness by generating innovative environmental and technological solutions to global and national challenges. In this context, cooperatives have become centers of social innovation, active users of digitalization, and critical actors in sustainable development.

3.1. Social Innovation and New Solution Areas in Cooperatives

Social innovation is the process of finding solutions to existing social problems (poverty, migration, climate change, social exclusion) through new ideas, products, services, or models. Kılıç & Aydoğan (2022, p. 49) emphasize the role of cooperatives in addressing social needs, strengthening solidarity, and improving social well-being. In this respect, cooperatives represent one of the most concrete examples of social innovation today.

Cooperatives facilitate the collaborative development of solutions among individuals and communities by strengthening social capital (trust, networks, and shared norms); this is the sustainable foundation of social innovation (Majee, W., & Hoyt, A., 2011).

Circular Economy Examples: In Türkiye, some women's and agricultural cooperatives implement the zero-waste principle by transforming food waste (fruit peels, pulp) into vinegar or fertilizer, making tangible contributions to the circular economy. This not only provides environmental benefits but also creates additional sources of income. Service and Shared Use: Innovative models, such as establishing shared machinery parks in rural areas or providing maintenance services through social service cooperatives in urban areas, ensure efficient use of resources and reduction of social costs.

3.2. Acceleration of Digital Transformation and E-Commerce Capacity

Digitalization is a defining dynamic that offers the potential to increase cooperatives' market access, reduce operational costs, and strengthen their institutional capacity. A significant portion of cooperative members in Turkiye are seeking training on cooperatives, particularly in areas critical to the digital age, such as firsthand experience with successful examples and marketing/branding (Everest, B. et al. 2019).

- Expanding Market Access: Cooperatives, especially women's cooperatives, deliver their products directly to consumers through national e-commerce platforms, their own digital marketplaces, and social media channels. This eliminates intermediaries, increases members' income, and ensures transparency.

- Need for Capacity Building: Current research shows that while the vast majority of cooperatives use social media, they struggle to effectively translate these digital skills

into e-commerce and e-export. This highlights the importance of digital literacy and infrastructure development training for cooperatives. Meeting this need will determine the future of cooperatives in Turkiye in the 2025 perspective.

• Digitalization in Management: Legislative changes, such as the ability to hold general assemblies electronically, facilitate the participation of partners in decision-making processes, saving time and costs.

3.3. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Strategic Role of Cooperatives

Cooperatives play a key role in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which they aim to achieve by 2030. The principle of "Responsibility to Society" underlying cooperatives naturally guides them toward the implementation of the SDGs. Global literature positions cooperatives as strategic actors for sustainable development and inclusive growth, highlighting their impact on enhancing social cohesion at the local level (Bretos & Marcuello, 2017).

• Direct Contribution to the SDGs: Cooperatives directly contribute to SDGs 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (No Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) (Citation: Cooperatives and the SDG Relationship).

• Inclusive Growth: International organizations (ILO) and local workshops have also emphasized that cooperatives offer a concrete path to inclusive growth and decent work (SDG 8).

These dynamics confirm that cooperatives are not only a traditional form of organization in Turkiye, but also an innovative and strategic tool that responds to the economic, social, and environmental challenges of a rapidly changing era. The next section will explore these trends with concrete policy recommendations in the 2025 perspective.

4. Future Trends and Strategic Recommendations for Turkish Cooperatives

The future of cooperatives in Turkiye will be shaped by digital transformation, strengthening social economic policies, and social inclusion dynamics in the context of the International Year of Cooperatives (2025). These trends were comprehensively discussed by representatives from the public sector, academia, and cooperatives at the CIRIEC Turkiye Workshop, and a strategic roadmap for the future was drawn.

The workshop results confirm that cooperatives are not merely economic enterprises but also actors of social welfare and local development, and they outline the necessary steps to strengthen this role.

4.1. Main Trends Determining the Future (2025 Perspective)

In discussions about integrating into global value chains, the internationalization and networking capacities of cooperatives can offer the opportunity for an "alternative globalization" while preserving their democratic and locally based architecture (Bretos & Marcuello, 2017).

The key dynamics that will determine the future of cooperatives in Turkiye in the 2025 perspective are as follows:

1. Digital Capacity Development and the Acceleration of E-Commerce: It has been emphasized that digitalization is essential for the sustainability and market access of cooperatives. Providing cooperatives with digital tools, e-commerce consultancy, and training on platform cooperatives is critical to accelerating this transformation.
2. Strengthening Social Economic Policies and the Legal Framework: The strongest recommendation has emerged that the current Law No. 1163 is inadequate for social cooperatives and women's cooperatives, and that a special legal status should be defined for these social benefit-generating models under the name "social cooperative." The Ministry of Trade's efforts in this direction and the 2025-2029 Turkiye Cooperative Strategy indicate that these policies will be strengthened.
3. More Active Participation of Women and Youth: The role of women's cooperatives in reducing poverty and empowering women has been centralized. Establishing "social cooperative clubs" at universities to attract young people for the future and encouraging campus cooperatives to address basic needs such as housing and food has been presented as a key vision.

4.2. Structural Problems and Strategic Solution Suggestions

The high demand for training among members in Turkiye (especially the on-site examination of successful examples) demonstrates the urgency of field-based mentoring and training programs (Everest, B. et al. 2019). The CIRIEC Turkiye Workshop developed concrete policy recommendations to increase the effectiveness of cooperatives:

• Overcoming Legal and Bureaucratic Obstacles: A high-level structure should be established to ensure inter-ministerial coordination, and bureaucratic processes should be simplified to ensure women's cooperatives benefit from public support.

• Capacity Building and Mentoring: It has been determined that many cooperatives are unable to benefit from support due to a lack of knowledge and experience. To overcome this problem, it is essential to increase training in project writing, e-commerce, and financial literacy, and to establish mentoring networks comprised of academics and social entrepreneurs.

• Sustainability and Collaboration: To reduce dependence on external support for the sustainability of women's cooperatives, cooperation networks among existing cooperatives should be strengthened, and rating systems based on institutional performance should be implemented.

• Solutions to Logistics and Marketing Problems: Because high cargo costs, particularly for women's cooperatives, hinder competition, it has been suggested that bulk discounted cargo agreements and regional distribution centers be established through the Ministry of Commerce or municipalities. Furthermore, common branding and certification systems should be established for cooperative products.

4.3. The Strategic Role of Cooperatives

In conclusion, the findings of the CIRIEC Turkiye Workshop confirm that cooperatives play a strategic role in reshaping not only production relations but also a culture of solidarity, an understanding of social development, and gender equality in Turkiye. Policies aimed at training, digital capacity building, national and international networking, and strengthening social impact measurement systems will enable cooperatives to serve as both an economic and social lever in Turkiye's achievement of sustainable development goals.

Finally, the findings that cooperatives can simultaneously drive economic and social development through local employment and social capital generation confirm them as a unique institutional lever serving sustainable development goals (Majee, W., & Hoyt, A., 2011).

Conclusion

In today's world, cooperatives have ceased to be merely an economic form of organization; they have become one of the fundamental tools for social solidarity, ethical production, and sustainable development. The Turkish example offers a concrete test case for this transformation. The new generation of cooperatives, shaped by women and youth, prioritizes social benefit over economic activity, strengthening the people- and society-focused aspect of the social economy.

The findings demonstrate that cooperatives play an indispensable role in economic justice, inclusive growth, and local development. Cooperatives not only provide economic income to their members but also regenerate social capital based on education, solidarity, and trust. As emphasized by Bretos and Marcuello (2017), the ability of these structures to offer an "alternative globalization" model to the globalization process enables sustainable development at both the local and national levels to be realized on a democratic basis.

New generation cooperatives contribute to increasing social inclusiveness, particularly by encouraging women's entrepreneurship and youth participation in decision-making processes, and they play an active role in social innovation and digital transformation. The increasing visibility of women's cooperatives in Turkiye in recent years demonstrates that this structure has become a driver of both an economic and a cultural transformation.

The findings of the CIRIEC Turkiye workshops reveal that the future of cooperatives in Turkiye will be shaped around three fundamental dynamics: strengthening digital capacity, institutionalizing social economic policies, and more effective participation of women and youth. Digitalization, in particular, is of strategic importance for increasing cooperatives' market access and ensuring their sustainability.

Consequently, the cooperative movement in Turkiye is being reshaped as a "social innovation-focused development model" that combines its historical roots with the needs of the present day. Supporting cooperatives in education, digital transformation, mentoring, and international networking will serve as a powerful lever in Turkiye's achievement of its sustainable development goals in the context of the 2025 International Year of Cooperatives.

With its structure based on solidarity, equality, and human-centered development, cooperatives are emerging as a "third way" that reaffirms the human aspect of economic systems. In this context, the leading role of cooperatives in Turkiye's social economy vision should be strengthened both academically and politically.

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