

Cooperativas de cuidados en Uruguay, Argentina y Chile; una mirada a sus obstáculos y oportunidades para lograr el desarrollo

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Resumen. Este artículo presenta un estudio exploratorio sobre los factores que fortalecen a las cooperativas de cuidado en Uruguay, Argentina y Chile. Estas organizaciones voluntarias se basan en el concepto de "trabajo decente", con el objetivo de brindar soluciones a la formalización laboral, las aspiraciones económicas y la creciente demanda de servicios de cuidado de la población. Sin embargo, a pesar de sus objetivos, estas cooperativas a menudo encuentran barreras relacionadas con la equidad de género, la dinámica del mercado laboral y las condiciones de bienestar que obstaculizan su alineación con estos ideales. Esta situación abre la siguiente pregunta de investigación: ¿Cuáles son las condiciones bajo las cuales se constituyen las cooperativas de cuidado en Uruguay, Argentina y Chile? Para trabajar la cuestión propuesta nuestro objetivo general es explorar las experiencias y percepciones de las personas asociadas al mundo de las cooperativas de cuidados. Para investigar esta dinámica, realizamos 16 entrevistas electrónicas semiestructuradas en Uruguay, Argentina y Chile, utilizando un enfoque de muestreo en bola de nieve. Estas entrevistas profundizaron en los principales obstáculos y facilitadores que influyen en el desarrollo de estas iniciativas cooperativas. Nuestros hallazgos subrayan los diversos desafíos que enfrentan las cooperativas de atención, incluidos aquellos asociados con cuestiones relacionadas con el género, la falta de experiencia y la necesidad esencial de apoyo tanto público como privado. El logro de este artículo es establecer una plataforma de diálogo en torno a las cooperativas de cuidado dentro del Cono Sur de América Latina. Arrojamus luz sobre el imperativo de la formalización y los complejos problemas que surgen al intentar satisfacer la creciente demanda de servicios de cuidado en la región.

Palabras clave: Cooperativas de cuidado; Género; Trabajo informal; Latinoamérica.

Claves Econlit: B55; J16; J46; J54.

[en] Care cooperatives in Uruguay, Argentina and Chile; a look at their hinderers and opportunities to achieve development

Abstract. This article presents an exploratory study on the factors that bolster care cooperatives in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. These voluntary organizations are founded on the concept of "decent work," aiming to provide solutions for labor formalization, economic aspirations, and the growing demand for care services within the population. However, despite their objectives, these cooperatives often encounter barriers related to gender equity, labor market dynamics, and welfare conditions that hinder their alignment with these ideals. This situation opens the next research question: What are the conditions under which care cooperatives are established in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile? To work on the question proposed our general objective is to explore the experiences and perceptions of individuals associated with the world of care cooperatives. To investigate these dynamics, we conducted 16 semi-structured electronic interviews in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, utilizing a snowball sampling approach. These interviews delved into the primary hinderers and facilitators influencing the development of these cooperative initiatives. Our findings underscore the diverse challenges faced by care cooperatives, including those associated with gender-related issues, a lack of expertise, and the essential need for both public and private support. The achievement of this article is to establish a platform for dialogue surrounding care cooperatives within the Southern Cone of Latin America. We shed light on the imperative for formalization and the complex issues that arise when attempting to meet the burgeoning demand for care services in the region.

Keywords: Care cooperatives; Gender; Labor market; Informality work; Latin America.

Summary. 1. Introduction. 2. Literature review. 3. Methodology. 4. Results. 5. Discussion. 6. Conclusions. 7. References.

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1. Introduction

Cooperatives represent a response to the demand for labor in a population characterized by sporadic provision of care-related services and the challenges associated with informal work (ICA, 1995; ILO, 2002; Molina et al, 2019; Lobato-Caballeros et al, 2022; Forno & Graziano, 2019). In this sense, cooperatives emerge as autonomous associations of individuals who voluntarily come together through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise to address the need for formalization and common economic, social, and cultural aspirations (DAES, 2018). The formation of these organizations enables coordination among workers, often women, who establish communication networks to pursue job opportunities, breaking away from job insecurity and the isolation that these individuals experience in relation to the care work they provide to support themselves financially (Ribas et al., 2022; Flanders, 2014; Nembhard, 2014; Poo & Conrad, 2015; Savitch-Lew, 2015). However, academic research has revealed that the impact of belonging to a cooperative on dimensions such as gender perspective, the labor market in conjunction with the social, political, and economic context, and the welfare conditions might not align with the ideals of "decent work" upon which these organizations are founded (Montero Vargas et al. 2020), dimensions on which there is a lack of further research development in Southern Cone countries.

The economic instability and social vulnerability prevalent in Latin American countries (ILO, 2018; Sols et al., 2019) have created an environment conducive to the emergence of cooperatives as a form of collective organization. These cooperatives have positioned themselves as key supporters of the social economy in countries like Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile (Toledo 2022; Rosaldo 2022; Amarante et al. 2021; Arroyo, 2020). Notably, a specific type of cooperative has arisen, with a focus on providing care services. These cooperatives are unique in their ability to address the needs of unpaid caregivers seeking entry into the labor market while also providing care recipients with access to services that meet their needs (Molina et al., 2019). The structural difficulties faced by service providers linked to care and health in developing their profession, compounded by the current crisis in service provision across Latin America, have reinforced the significance of care cooperatives as a fundamental cornerstone for achieving labor inclusion and improving the daily lives of those who require such services. (Nieves, 2011; ECLAC, 2020; 2019).

Likewise, Correa (2022) highlights the diversity of situations and contexts related to cooperatives in the region, particularly in the southern cone. The author (2022) emphasizes two distinct groups of countries. The first category, which includes Uruguay and Argentina, stands out for having a highly advanced cooperative development, as seen by high cooperative participation rates, a broad range of services, and public-private funding for elderly care, dependent population, and early childhood programs. Conversely, the second group, represented by countries like Chile, lags in terms of cooperative participation and offers a more limited range of services, primarily focused on early childhood, with mixed financing that includes significant private support (Correa, 2022).

In this project, we aim to assess the primary barriers and enablers of care cooperative creation in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile from a gender perspective. Given the relatively unexplored nature of this research field, our guiding question was: What are the conditions under which care cooperatives are established in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile? Based on this question, our general objective is to explore the experiences and perceptions of individuals associated with the world of care cooperatives. As specific objectives, we seek to (i) describe the hindering and facilitating conditions that influence the establishment of care cooperatives in these three countries (ii) examine the challenges, opportunities, and motivators faced by care cooperative participants in each country, and (iii) analyze the primary obstacles and facilitators influencing the establishment of care cooperatives in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. For this, we conducted a qualitative study focused on discourse analysis, which involved 16 interviews with individuals associated with the cooperative sector in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. The results describe those hinderers that care cooperatives face in fields associated with gender and cultural aspects, the need for support, the lack of experience linked to internal functioning; and consequently in the variety of facilitators and difficulties that cooperative work presents in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile.

This article is organized as follows: First, we present the theoretical framework of cooperatives, including gender roles within these organizations, the labor market context in Latin America, and the specific characteristics of care cooperatives in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. Next, we discuss the design and empirical strategy that guide our research. Afterward, we present the results of our research, and we discuss our empirical results. Finally, we conclude with a theoretical discussion.

2. Literature review

2.1. Work cooperatives in the current context

Over the past few decades, cooperatives have emerged as a key sort of organization for setting up collaborative and community-based types of work (ILO, 2015). Since their inception, cooperatives have prioritized ideals like democracy, equity, solidarity, community, and decentralization while pursuing goals like facilitating economic involvement among members, free organization of workers, and a decent work horizon (Flanders, 2014; Nembhard, 2014; Poo & Conrad, 2015; Savitch-Lew, 2015; Montero Vargas et al., 2020). These institutions are the outcome of a number of historical processes, including the revival of their respective economies and the surmounting of the closure of their labor markets (Dzembrowski, 2018; Angélico et al., 2008), as well as the organization of unemployed workers to obtain a form of remuneration, especially in the case of the participation of people with difficulties in joining the labor market (Prieto, 2022). Additionally, cooperatives stand out as sustainable productive options where the interchange of goods and services prevails for the common good, environmental conservation, and because they are founded on an "economy of trust" that values interpersonal relationships (Alisa et al., 2015; Grasseni, 2015).

Recent studies have described the benefits and drawbacks that these groups represent: the connection between working conditions and cooperative membership (ILO, 2015; Matthew & Bransburg, 2017; Matthew, 2017); their important contribution to a country's economy, given that they allow reducing factors such as poverty, employment and business informality (CICOPA, 2017; Ortuño et al., 2022); their beneficial function in assisting with the growth of people's livelihoods and reducing poverty, decreasing the instability and vulnerability of poverty-stricken households' livelihoods and increasing the income of their members (Wang et al., 2022; ILO, 2015).

However, research has revealed poor effects in certain relevant dimensions, such as labor extension, welfare conditions, social security, and gender equity or remuneration, despite the fact that the orientation of cooperatives is heavily influenced by the conception of "decent work" (Montero Vargas et al. 2020). The autonomy associated with cooperatives may also have an impact on a higher level of social unprotection, associated with the responsibility they assume in their self-organization (Veas, 2022) or the fact that some decisions may take longer than expected because the democratic process used by the participants does not always account for the market's need for speedy decisions (Ribas et al., 2022).

Cooperatives have a long-standing historical presence, dating back to the late nineteenth century, and have experienced notable growth throughout the twentieth century in Latin America (Coque Martínez, 2002). Today, they remain a significant form of workers' organization, characterized by unique attributes that empower laborers to effectively navigate the challenges posed by the current labor market contexts (Dzembrowski, 2018; Arrieta et al., 2022; Fajardo, 2022). These cooperative structures serve as pivotal hubs for individuals with shared needs and interests (Arrieta, 2019). The foregoing, worker cooperatives are now used as a tactic to lessen the labor market uncertainty of its members when they are designed around independent contractors who work in trades or as professionals (Jang, 2017). They are also a channel for new forms of collaborative work, through the available digital platforms (Arrieta, 2022) and the incorporation of migrants into the labor world, by enabling the employability of this group based on the organization among people with similar experiences, interests, and histories (Arrieta et al., 2022).

Last but not least, utilizing the services provided by cooperatives can significantly improve the well-being of its members (Ma & Abdulai, 2016; Liu et al., 2022). Cooperatives share certain traits but are structured differently depending on the social and economic environments in which they are formed, as well as the national regulatory frameworks (Fajardo, 2022). For example, the evidence shows that while some countries like Spain have endowed cooperatives with specific legal frameworks providing them with their organizational models, other countries, like France or Italy, have more comprehensive regulatory frameworks that do not specifically include the concept of cooperatives and with the law that permits the formation of this sort of organization through other legal figures (Fajardo, 2022).

2.2. Gender, inequality and cooperatives

A social and economic undervaluation of feminine positions results from the division of work based on gender (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990). In this way, gender roles have a significant impact on the notion that women are primarily responsible for providing care, which has an impact on their access to and progression through the labor market (Araujo & Hirata, 2020; Miranda, Inostroza and Yáñez, 2021). For example, 42% of working-age women in Chile report not being available to participate in the labor market, while that figure reaches only 5% in the case of men (ILO, 2018).

Cooperatives and other businesses with a social economy connection are not exempt from societal factors relating to women entering the workforce. The percentages of involvement in management bodies, representation, and positions played by men and women inside cooperatives nevertheless differ significantly

from one another. According to several studies, these environments exhibit smaller gender inequalities than other work contexts (FUNDACIÓN MUJERES, 2011; de Arce, 2017; Caballero, 2018). According to Crompton & Sanderson (1990), women's involvement in cooperatives follows a similar pattern depending on the kinds of activities they engage in. This means that the absence of women from these organizations' deliberative management bodies may not accurately reflect the rise in women's involvement, which is typically focused on specialized jobs rather than representational roles (de Arce, 2017). In order to avoid reproducing the gender discrepancies present in other productive and economic sectors, cooperatives must move away from their core values, which place a strong emphasis on gender equality (Alid, 2016; Miranda, Inostroza and Yáñez, 2021), and from the principles that encourage the compatibility of care responsibilities and productive work, based on the understanding of people as a whole (Ribas & Sajardo, 2004).

According to the literature, there are both objective-material and subjective constraints that prevent more women from participating fully, actively, and sustainably in cooperatives. The psychological traits of the participants or their self-esteem are examples of subjective elements that help to explain why there are not many women in these types of organizations (Romero, 2012). While the objective-material reasons are linked to the country's own economic and social structure, associated with the characteristics of domestic work, the problem of double working hours or the limitations faced by women in accessing paid work (Romero, 2012). According to another theoretical viewpoint, there are additional problems related to gender roles that help explain the low persistence of women's engagement in cooperatives. It is stated that women have experienced prejudice from their families due to the exercise of parenting and that their employment as entrepreneurs is seriously lacking in credibility (Hernández & Sánchez, 2018) and to the traditional ideal woman model reproduced by family traditions, linking their functions to the exercise of domestic work (de Arce, 2017).

Gender dynamics and barriers to women's participation are recognized in a variety of cooperatives, including cooperatives in Europe and in indigenous community groups of Latin America, where stereotypes and hindrances are reproduced there (Díaz, 2015). However, the literature demonstrates that nowadays cooperatives have experienced a turning point in the relationship between women's participation and their own desire in joining these kinds of groups, the existence of a process of female empowerment, and challenging the dominant gender roles (Díaz, 2015). Studies in Ecuador (Ortuño et al., 2022), Chile (FUNDACIÓN MUJERES, 2011), and Argentina (de Arce, 2017) demonstrate that women in cooperatives have had the opportunity to develop their labor skills through implemented training programs. Nevertheless, they have not received adequate training in project management, resulting in cooperatives facing difficulties in clearly expressing their social and economic objectives. Consequently, cooperatives may not serve as an alternative that generates the necessary income for subsistence (Ortuño et al., 2022).

In recent years, there has been a trend toward greater female participation in cooperatives (Infante Cruz et al., 2019; de Arce, 2017). Given the commercial component that cooperative activity has, this has benefited women not just in terms of the economy but also in terms of their social and subjective recognition (Jacinto, de Oliveira, & Fernandes, 2014). The fundamental source of this recognition is the inclusion of women in other cooperative tasks, such as manufacturing or the exchange of goods produced from commercial activity, which strengthens their sense of involvement (Zimmermann, de Oliveira, & Basso, 2020). Additionally, it has been noted that when women participate more in cooperatives, they also assume a greater degree of agency, responsibility, and autonomy in the performance of their duties, which contributes to an increase in women's time lack (Soto, 2019).

2.3. Labor market in Latin America and feminization of informal or precarious work

Although there are different ways of conceptualizing informal and precarious work, either by differentiating jobs according to their productive structure or the type of regulations that jobs have (Gasparini & Tornarolli, 2009; Holland & Hummel, 2022), there is a theoretical consensus that informal work represents lower quality employment, low wages and less access to social security (Chen 2007; Carretero et al. 2017; ILO 2002; Kurcera et al. 2008; Amarante et al. 2021; ILO 2021). The literature has, also been interested in analyzing how informality reflects a mode of exclusion of a significant segment of the population, which is barred from higher-quality employment as a result of the shortcomings of these countries' production systems (Perry et al., 2007), allowing informality to emerge as a profitable economic possibility due to the lack of integration of the different sectors of the economy (Arroyo, 2020).

The relevance of informal work as a dominating type of employment in the region is confirmed by employment statistics in Latin American labor markets, which allow describing the region's labor structure. This is a commonly shared problem in Chile, which has a central focus on public policy to address this issue. (Berniell et al., 2021). In the case of Argentina and Uruguay, labor informality constitutes about 30% of the labor force in the region, in which women in informal labor are around 25%. (ILO, 2018), It shows that, despite the labor markets' significant heterogeneity, there are some common and unique characteristics that are worth highlighting (Solís et al., 2019). The prevalence of self-employed, unskilled, and transitory

employment, which account for two out of every five jobs in various Latin American nations, is one factor that would explain the predominance of the informal sector in the region (ECLAC, 2017), which is evident in a wealth of new scholarship that focuses on examining the circumstances of this type of workers today (Toledo 2022; Rosaldo 2022; Amarante et al. 2021, Arroyo, 2020).

Labor informality is a phenomenon that is strongly associated with women, especially in the case of emerging economies, reflected in lower economic compensation (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990; Berniell et al. 2021; Villanueva et al. 2020), due to their responsibility for unpaid auxiliary family work or activities in jobs that are less valued in the labor market (ILO 2018; Villanueva et al. 2020). Gender roles and family tendencies are still strongly rooted in Latin America (ECLAC, 2016), which shapes different types of labor segregation present in the feminization of informal employment (Barberá et al. 2011; Silvestre Ramos 2016; Cebrián et al. 2018) such as the existence of certain occupations linked to the "feminine" or barriers to access to higher positions or greater responsibility in the hierarchies of their jobs.

Given the precarious nature of labor and the considerable feminization of this sort of job, it is important to investigate how labor informality constitutes a relevant phenomenon for understanding the forms of labor organization in Latin America. The preponderance of informal and precarious employment in this area may serve to understand the importance of cooperatives as decent employment alternatives, especially in the case of women (Montero Vargas et al, 2020). In addition, some of the circumstances that informal insecure work does not offer in terms of social security or other forms of social protection are made available through the services offered by cooperatives.

2.4. Care cooperatives and decent work; welfare conditions and the provision of care in Latin America

Care cooperatives offer a means of balancing the population's requirements for care labor with those of service providers, particularly in instances of informal or insecure employment without social protection (Arrieta, 2022). This kind of cooperatives represents an opportunity for caregiving, allowing for the professionalization of the labor to advance while also enabling a respite from the precariousness and atomization experienced by those who carry out these caregiving responsibilities informally (Molina et al., 2019). The construction of these organizations allows coordination among workers, generally women, generating a favorable context for the formation of communication networks among them, which replace the model of transmission of job opportunities such as "word of mouth" that characterizes this type of work (Molina et al. 2019). The introduction of care cooperatives has a favorable effect on caregivers lives since it gives them a way to integrate into the job market through membership in these groups (Matthew & Bransburg, 2017) and facilitates the creation of dual care mechanisms that value the labor of those who do their jobs in secure environments while also supplying care services to the appropriate users (Freytes Frey, 2019).

The literature has reported how the creation of cooperatives can be due to the initiative of organized workers and can also be promoted by the state as an employability strategy (Hopp & Casparian, 2021). These initiatives from the State have shown important achievements in terms of the creation of cooperatives and of providing a form of organization that allow subsequent self-management of workers, but also show the limits of their future projection considering the difficulties of sustaining their activity in the long term (Hopp & Casparian, 2021). The experiences of care cooperatives also demonstrate that people are not necessarily interested in duplicating these logics, despite the fact that cooperatives are focused on empowering workers with regard to their roles at work. According to Hopp and Casparian (2021) women working in these firms may want to have a position that is somewhat inferior to those who hire them.

To contextualizes the selected countries regarding the care area, in Chile, the political institutionalization of care is centralized in the National Subsystem of Support and Care (SNAC), also called "*Chile Cuida*". The beneficiaries of SNAC are part of 60% of the country's most vulnerable households with people in a situation of functional dependence, individuals over 60 years old, girls and boys in a situation of dependence, and their caregivers. The support they receive under this subsystem includes technical assistance, home adaptations, training, access to home care programs, guidance, and service provision through daytime centers for severity prevention, among others. In Argentina, the beneficiaries are children, adolescents, people with disabilities, older people, and care workers, who are implemented through national and subnational measures, in the areas of health, social development, or education. Finally, in Uruguay, those who receive benefits are early childhood, populations with dependence, older people, and caregivers, determining beneficiaries through the Personal Assistants Program: people in a situation of dependence between 0 and 29 years old and those over 80 in a situation of severe dependence. The state finances caregivers, but they must be certified.

It is also clear that cooperatives can contribute to combating the so-called "care crisis" experienced by contemporary societies (Setién & Acosta, 2010), positioning themselves as a promising model for care delivery (Molina et al., 2019; Freytes Frey et al., 2019). Care cooperatives present a chance to deliver community care services, from the provision of communal services, transportation, or care for adults, while

presenting lucrative economic prospects to the providers of such services in a context of significant demographic transitions (Mastronardi et al., 2020). However, it should not be lost sight the fact that these organizational initiatives should be coordinated with other types of reforms and public initiatives that allow other important dimensions of this work to be highlighted, such as the principles of cooperation, the need for care, and the gender distinctions faced when observing these policies (Mahon & Robinson, 2011; Tronto, 2011; Williams, 2011). Evidence suggests that care cooperatives should be supplemented with the adoption of promotion, regulation, and support policies that contribute to the growth of the labor market in addition to the fact that they can help with sustainability and capacity to create jobs. This would allow us to better face the specific contexts faced by different societies, such as in the case of the pandemic or the current economic crises (Hopp & Casparian, 2021). In addition to these complementary initiatives, specific efforts should also be made to strengthen the role of care cooperatives, including financing systems, technical support, or training, while at the same time having adequate regulatory frameworks for the development of cooperatives (Mastronardi et al., 2020; Freytes Frey, 2019).

Therefore, in a setting of dynamic labor markets and the appearance of new issues in the context of care, cooperatives constitute a significant means of structuring new kinds of employment. Therefore, in a setting of dynamic labor markets and the appearance of new issues in the context of care, cooperatives constitute a significant means of structuring new kinds of employment (Arriagada, 2010). In particular, care cooperatives have become an opportunity to solve two complex problems (Molina et al., 2019) first, the labor precariousness and informality of large sectors of the population, and second, the difficulties in the provision of care. However, the literature demonstrates the hurdles faced by care cooperatives to avoid reproducing endemic issues in Latin America as well as the limitations that these organizations may experience in carrying out both tasks. From here arises the question that guided this research: what have been the main obstacles and facilitators in the process of formation of care cooperatives in Latin America, under a gender and sustainability perspective?

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

This study aimed to explore the experiences of individuals associated with the world of care cooperatives, describing the primary barriers and enablers influencing the establishment of this type of cooperatives in three countries of the southern cone: Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. This was accomplished through a qualitative study focused on discourse analysis (Patton, 2014). Given the absence of comprehensive academic studies on this phenomenon, the research objectives are exploratory and descriptive. Consequently, a deductive logic approach was adopted, wherein the main topics identified in previous investigations were further examined to structure a semi-structured interview guideline.

In the literature review, four central topics were identified as guiding the exploration of the hinderers and facilitators of care cooperatives in the interviews: gender differences in access to care-related jobs (FUNDACIÓN MUJERES, 2011; de Arce, 2017; Caballero, 2018), the characteristics of the labor market and the levels of informality in each context (ILO, 2018; Berniell et al., 2021), and the concept of “decent work” used as horizon in the development of care cooperatives in relation with the political and economic context of each country (ILO, 2015; Matthew & Bransburg, 2017; Matthew, 2017; Flanders, 2014; Nembhard, 2014; Poo & Conrad, 2015; Savitch-Lew, 2015; Montero Vargas et al, 2020).

3.2. Sample

The three countries were considered using Correa's criterion (2022), who states that "two groups of countries stand out: those with greater cooperative participation (Ecuador, Argentina, and Uruguay) and those with less participation (Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, and Colombia)" (2022, p. 32). In this way, Chile was chosen as the country with lower participation and development, Argentina and Uruguay were picked as examples of Latin American countries with more significant growth and contributions. In this manner, a comparative analysis was conducted between two distinct realities within the southern cone, aiming to explore both the differences and similarities that these cases exhibit.

The cases in these countries were selected using snowball sampling. This sampling method facilitates access to hard-to-reach groups for research purposes, such as contexts distant from the academic team conducting the research (Abela, 2002; Patton, 2014). Consequently, the affiliation of one of the researchers with the OBIESCOOP institution, a network associated with the Ibero-American Observatory of Employment, Social, and Cooperative Economy, played a vital role in expanding the research scope to the selected countries.

The inclusion criteria for the interviews were as follows: (1) individuals associated with the cooperative sector, either from academia or cooperative organizations, (2) residing in Uruguay, Argentina, or Chile, and (3) possessing a minimum of 5 years of experience in the cooperative sector related to caregiving, either from direct work in cooperatives or from academia. With these well-defined criteria, interviews were conducted until a point of information saturation was reached, at which additional cases would not provide new substantial insights in relation to the research question and objectives.

As a result, a total of 16 interviews were conducted, comprising 6 cases from Uruguay, 6 cases from Argentina, and 4 cases from Chile. The sample consisted of 12 women (5 in Argentina, 5 in Uruguay, and 2 in Chile) and 4 men (1 in Uruguay, 1 in Argentina, and 2 in Chile). Regarding the age of the interviewees, they ranged from 40 to 70 years old, mostly having higher education degrees. It is also noteworthy that 78% had occupations related to the social sector, while the remaining worked in administrative and financial areas.

3.3. Information gathering

Initially, a comprehensive literature review and documentary search were conducted to examine the national care plans of the three selected nations in relation to cooperatives as an organizational model for receiving and providing care. In addition, four significant focal points related to cooperative work detailed in the literature review were identified, which served as the basis for developing an interview guide.

Additionally, the interviews sought to address the opportunities, challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of care cooperatives in each context. Furthermore, the interviews were aimed at exploring the achievements and obstacles faced in establishing and operating cooperative systems in this domain. As a starting point, the participants were asked to relate their experience of participation and connection with the cooperative movement and/or the care sector in general. Subsequently, the participants were asked about the specific obstacles and gender-related issues that impede the growth and development of cooperatives. The interviews also gave space to discuss the legislative support for cooperatives in each country, as well as the necessary organizations that foster the promotion of care. Finally, attention was paid to the current challenges and the possible solutions that could be implemented, making the guide adapt to the information shared by each interviewee.

All interviews were electronically conducted by the academic team responsible for this research. Considering the necessity to delve into the research field, the interviews followed a semi-structured approach (Patton, 2014). This format allowed the researchers to improvise questions and interactions during each interview, aiming to elicit more precise and comprehensive information to address the research question effectively (Patton, 2014).

3.4. Analysis Strategy

The technique utilized in the study is discourse analysis with pre-established categories in a deductive way of analysis. The primary goal of this approach is to investigate the relationships between different topics discussed in the text, taking into account not only the explicit context but also the implicit and underlying meanings conveyed by the words used (Krippendorff, 1990; Patton, 2014). Before applying the analysis matrix, it is essential to establish the initial relationship models that will serve as the basis for coding. The deductive method is employed to formulate definitional criteria, which are continuously refined through a feedback loop until a main category is derived. The intention is to minimize the categories for each section or segment of the text, addressing specific questions or aspects (Abela, 2002).

To transcribe the interviews, content analysis matrices were used. This process involved extracting and organizing categories and subcategories from each interview in the order they were presented. Subsequently, the data underwent a purification process to eliminate redundancies and identify recurring elements across all interviews. These elements were then utilized to create preliminary categories that encompassed the entirety of the data (Campos & Mujica, 2018). The intermediate model resulting from the preliminary analysis was further refined through a feedback loop, ultimately arriving at the final categories. This iterative process ensures a comprehensive and rigorous examination of the data, capturing the essence of the underlying information in the research.

4. Results

In this section, the focus centers on the outcomes derived from the interview process. The content initiates by an exploration of the difficulties associated to gender disparities and cultural aspects that affects care cooperatives. Then it is described the results associated with the difficulties of female work and labor market. In third place, we took it is analysed the facilitators linked to the internal functioning of care

cooperatives, and the construction of networks. Subsequently, one of the findings outside the analytical categories defined in the literature review is presented, describing the facilitators associated with the internal functioning of cooperatives, and those aspects that promotes the construction of networks.

In line with the definition provided by DAES (2018), it is imperative to underscore as an initial discovery that throughout the course of the 16 interviews conducted across the three countries, respondents conceptualized cooperative work as collaborations wherein individuals unite for the common good, with collective benefits as the primary objective. Moreover, the interviews underscored a distinct gender differentiation prevalent within care cooperatives, indicating a prominent female participation contingent on the specific type of work performed. Additionally, the interviews illuminated that care cooperatives in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile predominantly focus on domestic services within homes. This brings forth a noteworthy concern regarding the feasibility of establishing a shared space for organizing, fostering gatherings, and thereby engendering cooperative alliances that fortify the pursuit of "decent work." This pursuit occurs within a regional context where labor market regulations have resulted in diminished unionization rates (Hopp & Casparian, 2021).

4.1. Difficulties associated with gender and cultural aspects

Regarding the gender perspective within cooperatives, a consensus within the literature highlights that care-related labor remains marginalized within the formal labor market, and care work itself often goes unrecognized as legitimate employment (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990; Araujo & Hirata, 2020; Miranda, Inostroza, and Yáñez, 2021). Consequently, the interviews conducted in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile underscore the difficulty of perceiving caregiving as a profession that can foster economic autonomy. The challenge lies in acknowledging caregiving as a substantial role, with rightful working hours and associated rights, particularly in the face of societal pressures that traditionally assign caregiving responsibilities to women.

Moreover, the very nature of care, being an intangible need largely confined to the domestic realm (Araujo & Hirata, 2020), complicates the creation of a business model that can effectively capture the value of caregiving services in a way that resonates with citizens. Conversely, in alignment with de Arce's findings (2017), the analysis of these interviews reveals a consistent pattern across all studied countries. The role of being a woman significantly impacts the time dedicated to cooperative engagements, especially for those who are also mothers. Juggling childcare responsibilities while participating in cooperative activities proves to be a challenge, exerting pressure on their dual roles as both caregivers and workers. This dynamic directly influences the time and energy they can allocate to cooperative tasks. For example, instances emerged in Uruguay and Chile where cooperatives were established with members who did not have children or had older children—thus needing less childcare—replacing those women whose motherhood commitments hindered their active engagement in certain tasks.

Table. 1. Interview passages on gender

<p>" (...) Uruguay (...) in gender issues, has a very clear component regarding the role that work implies and the historical postponement that women have had in accessing and entering the labor market, but also in how issues such as care have been, but totally marginalized from this area, and that in the end care has ended up being a subsidy for, in the end, how work has been generated in this capitalist system. Work in the capitalist system has been given by a subsidy that means not remunerating care work." (46-year old Uruguayan advisor)</p>
<p>"(...) telling them that this is work, caring is not to go to heaven, it is not for love, caring implies a job and must have a working day, must have rights(...)" (58-year old Chilean lawyer and spokesperson of feminist movements).</p>

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

Given the historical context wherein women have been predominantly responsible for caregiving, often stemming from entrenched patriarchal norms that perpetuate this pattern (Miranda, Inostroza, & Yáñez, 2021), it becomes pertinent to assert that collectivized initiatives aimed at care work can indeed yield advantages for working mothers (Ribas et al., 2022; Flanders, 2014; Nembhard, 2014). These advantages encompass aspects such as enhanced employment opportunities, the establishment of robust networks, and

the amplification of women's influence in socioeconomic decision-making processes (FUNDACIÓN MUJERES, 2011; de Arce, 2017; Caballero, 2018). Therefore, the citations documented in Table 1 underscore a significant point: while care obligations may have traditionally been culturally enforced upon women, care cooperatives serve as mechanisms to transform these responsibilities into sources of economic independence. As a result, these cooperatives emerge as catalysts for women's autonomy and empowerment.

Table 2 presents a discerning analysis of the gender-based division in care work, particularly concerning the aging population, and its intricate connection with the provision of fundamental rights for this specific demographic. Within this context, a striking perspective emerges from the dialogue with a 58-year-old lawyer, illustrating a confluence of pivotal issues that illuminate the Chilean landscape. This perspective underlines the predicament faced by numerous older women who lack the necessary support networks due to their age, a predicament less common among older men who typically possess informal care systems. This observation, which harmonizes with de Arce's observations (2017), signals a notable reality: the bulk of care cooperative users and contributors are women. This choice is often driven by women's preference to be cared for by female caregivers, motivated by considerations of modesty. This preference inadvertently perpetuates the gender-based task distribution that prevails in Chilean society, as expounded by Miranda, Inostroza, and Yáñez (2021).

This situation encompasses two analytical dimensions. The first entails the aforementioned dilemma, wherein the dominance of women within the care cooperative realm reinforces the gender role of "women as caregivers." This, however, intersects with the imperative for care recipients to exercise agency and autonomy over their daily lives. The second dimension delves into the significant lack of male participation in care cooperatives, rooted in Chilean cultural barriers that discourage male engagement in caregiving. Evidently, the excerpt presented in Table 2 indirectly alludes to the scarcity of initiatives and policies that proactively encourage men to participate in this form of labor.

Table. 2. Interview passages on gender and cultural aspects

"(...) you also have to respect the cultural decisions of older adults, and older adults have a hard time being taken care of by a man. 80% of the people cared for are women, of which we have, because they have no one to take care of them. On the other hand, there is always someone who takes care of men, very rarely there are those who do not take care of them. We continue to replicate this idea that women take care of them, therefore, men are taken care of, women, they take care of them, and women have no one to take care of us as old people, now, in the current reality (...) We still think that care can be executed by anyone, but we also believe that, being a human right, we must also respect the decision of the elderly, how they feel better, how we really improve their quality of life (...)"(58-year old Chilean lawyer and spokesperson of feminists movements).

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

4.2. Difficulties associated with female work and labor market

In line with the findings presented by Barberá et al. (2011), Ramos (2016), and Cebrián et al. (2018), the interviews shed light on a series of challenges intricately linked to the female work, the labor market and prevailing legislative structures. Specifically, the discussions reveal that both Argentina and Chile face difficulties in adequately recognizing institutional responsibilities concerning caregiving within the labor market. This lack of acknowledgment allows caregiving to often remain unnoticed and unregulated within specific legal frameworks, provoking that female work as a criticizable attitude in society. The insights gathered from the interviews emphasize that this disparity stands as a significant obstacle, hampering the establishment and sustained functionality of care cooperatives.

One of the most significant experiences highlighted in this context pertains to the social criticism faced within both the familial nucleus and the broader social environment when women choose to work outside their homes. The accounts from women who actively participated in care cooperatives reveal instances where their involvement was met with reproach, often stemming from a perspective that considers caregiving as unproductive. These situations exposed them to degrading comments about the nature of cooperative work. This challenge is further compounded by the absence of a supportive space that could provide them with a network of encouragement during such circumstances, impeding the formation of a cohesive community of workers.

This sentiment resonates similarly with the testimony of the Argentine public official. The lack of effective oversight and regulatory legislation concerning the administrative facets of cooperatives results in a

stagnation of growth and organizational development among these groups. The dearth of supervisory personnel and a robust internal framework leaves cooperatives devoid of the necessary public support, particularly when it comes to navigating the bureaucratic intricacies they are required.

Table. 3. Interview passages on support difficulties

<p>"They were well criticized, several separated, they were very criticized by their husbands because they went out to work, they were going to earn a salary. They told them everything, with very bad terms, they told them that they were pure egging, flattening streets, that this did not serve anyone, and they maintained and sustained themselves in that (...)" (58-year-old Chilean lawyer and spokesperson of feminist movements).</p>
<p>"(...) the problem was that these people did not have someone who administratively could support the management of a cooperative. So, what is done in those cases, is like inviting someone, sometimes you invite someone who does not have the link of the cooperative because maybe it does not make sense, it does it more like charity. So, there the cooperatives enter into an issue that perhaps there is mismanagement or development, they stagnate, and there they depend a lot on this professional support or the accompaniment that public institutions can give." (51-year-old Chilean social worker).</p>
<p>"(...) because the general practitioner of the social work tells you, "Consult the neurologist", the social work gives you the neurologist I do not know where and within six months. In the middle the guy killed you. Or if it was a hip, he lost it. We live in such a disorganized system, so every man for himself, that in this context caregivers come." (30 years-old Argentinian civil servant).</p>

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

The last two quotes referenced in Table 3 underscore a common theme that prevails in both Argentina and Uruguay: a notable scarcity of readily available resources for seeking guidance on experiences in the field of care cooperatives. This scarcity is specifically related to understanding the optimal strategies to guarantee the autonomy and economic security of the participants. This absence of easily accessible guidance creates an environment in both countries that lacks substantial collaboration. Consequently, this deficiency acts as an obstacle, impeding the progress, expansion, and sustainability of these cooperative ventures.

Simultaneously, the perspective shared by the Argentine public servant accentuates a feeling of apprehension around the notion of functioning in a self-management capacity. It is important to remember that the people involved in care cooperatives often come from contexts characterized by significant levels of vulnerability, evident in their support networks and work circumstances (Perry et al., 2007; Arroyo, 2020), which is already a barrier that folds to this situation of Lack of references to follow.

Table. 4. Interview passages on difficulties associated with the experience

<p>"I think there is very little knowledge of what cooperative work means and there are no references that they could look at (...)" (58-year old Chilean lawyer and spokesperson of feminist movements).</p>
<p>"We talked to them about an ideal, but there was no reference to show. I think that is a difficulty because there's a lot of fear of working on your own." (58-year old Chilean lawyer and spokesperson of feminists movements).</p>

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

As highlighted by the quotation attributed to the Chilean social worker in Table 5, an internal difficulty within cooperatives revolves around the interplay between ingrained cultural norms and the cooperative's

principle of horizontality. This dynamic introduces a tension where the traditional hierarchical perception of employees and a superior affects the cooperative work environment in Chile. Additionally, the cooperative model is often viewed as a part-time endeavor or secondary employment, given the absence of a conventional employer who issues monthly payments. Consequently, women engaged in these cooperatives tend to allocate only a portion of their time to these activities.

The capital invested in these organizations is another obstacle to the formalization of cooperatives. Despite the establishment of legislation governing care cooperatives in Argentina and Chile, the funding supporting them plays a significant role in their effectiveness. The state encourages and aids in the formation of cooperatives but does not participate in the process of facilitating the temporal and financial viability of this type of organization, therefore the support offered by public efforts is frequently insufficient. This situation is even more critical during the first months of formalization of the cooperatives when the members contribute time and money to organizations that do not immediately provide them with economic retribution.

Other constraints that make it challenging to secure resources, such as the limited public funding for the various cooperative formation processes or the challenging effort of finding consumers willing to pay for care services, aggravate this. The members' reasoning of having a hierarchy and a supervisor can also prevent cooperatives from flourishing since they are less likely to take the initiative to complete a project for which no one member is completely responsible. The difficulty in this situation is managing communication, leadership, and organization while organizing one's workforce as well as the others to produce work synergy.

A prominent internal difficulty pertains to the challenges cooperatives encounter due to their composition, shaped by the labor market dynamics. In this sense, the limited degree of internal cohesion often hampers sustained organizational development over time. This circumstance underscores one of the factors contributing to the failure of many cooperatives to achieve growth and stability. It becomes evident that, across the three countries under scrutiny, cooperatives require more than just the collective goodwill of their members to thrive. Instead, they necessitate a cohesive shared vision that engenders a viable business plan and establishes concrete communication channels among their members.

Table. 5. Interview passages on internal difficulties

" (...) finally the members, as part of an idea that is not usually their main business or their main job, what it does is that the cooperatives begin to give them their pieces of time" (51 year-old Chilean social worker).
"Yes, throughout the cooperative sector this is seen as a necessity, I think it is typical of our cultural and educational idiosyncrasy where we were trained in a world where there is someone who commands and someone who obeys (...)" (58 year-old Argentinian sick woman who has been attended by care cooperatives).
"(...) but in a cooperative it becomes complex, apart from having to organize your own workforce, you have to organize the workforce of others, in organizational terms you have to try to maintain communication, leadership and organization, which obviously generates synergy, but carries a cost, and that cost is the forms, the time I dedicate to also be able to self-train (...)"(51 year-old Chilean social worker).

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

4.3. Facilitators linked to the internal functioning.

There is general agreement among the interviewees of Argentina and Chile regarding the critical significance of financing for their operation when it comes to the aspects that are thought to support the development and maintenance of care cooperatives. The experience of the interviewed expresses that income capital is one of the available sources of funding and is viewed as a first step for cooperatives and a means of ensuring sustainability without necessarily relying on government assistance, which tend to be insufficient. Public procurement by municipalities, which can be useful allies and an excellent client for this sort of cooperatives, is a relevant modality. To distinguish the cooperatives from the businesses that compete in the market, it would be a good idea for the State to grant them market quotas or some other form of preference. Municipal authorities can, however, be trained to prefer public procurement from cooperatives to produce capital from a caring standpoint.

Table. 6: Interview passages on facilitators

"[talking about <i>de Argentinian Legislation of cooperatives</i>] (...) the State has a promotion role as well as oversight" (39 year-old Argentinean member of a care cooperative).
"I proposed that system as getting on a boat and boat has to take off, who is prepared to get on that boat, where is going to go" (51 year-old Chilean social worker).

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

Conversely, it becomes evident that the states of Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile bear a dual role in relation to cooperatives—both as promoters and overseers. The analysis of the interviews underscores that effectively juggling these twin responsibilities can prove challenging for public authorities, as maintaining a coherent balance without tipping the scale in favor of one role over the other is a complex endeavor. Furthermore, individuals need to personally define their understanding of cooperative membership, enabling them to anticipate the commitments and expectations entailed in pursuing the cooperative path and aligning with its principles.

In addressing this topic, the respondents from each country recognize the necessity for progress in delineating duties and responsibilities within cooperatives. This strategic advancement aims to foster the evolution of groups sharing cooperative values into collaborative work teams. Employing metaphors that illustrate the cooperative as a collective system where unified efforts steer towards a common destination proves to be a productive methodological approach. This metaphorical framing serves as an internal catalyst to overcome obstacles hindering cooperative members.

Table. 7. Interview passages on facilitating entities

"(...) we were trying to influence that they could promote public procurement. In Italy, part of the success of social cooperatives is public procurement." (45-year-old Uruguayan member of the board of directors linked to cooperatives)
" (...)we at one point proposed that the State give the cooperatives market shares, no, you today as a company, you are going to compete in the market, unfortunately, but it would be good if perhaps the State made a difference (...)" (59 year-old Chilean social worker, trainer in cooperative incubator).
"(...) The subsidy given by PAMI is really miserable to have a girl (...)" (30 years-old Argentinian civil servant).

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

Within the context of Argentina, the quote presented in Table 8 unveils that the educational background and age composition of cooperative members serve as additional factors that shape to the establishment of cooperatives. This observation is equally applicable to the scenarios in Uruguay and Chile, where education and age significantly influence the range of opportunities accessible to individuals. For instance, one respondent claimed that being between the ages of 28 and 40 helps a group flourish as a cooperative since the participants can devote time and effort to the group and can create an associative project. Comprehensive training emerges as a pivotal aid, as it equips cooperative members with the necessary preparation for their prospective roles. In Argentina, the training covers a wide range of topics that include both theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretical topics such as gerontology studies are covered alongside practical aspects such as developing skills in patient handling through internships in public and private care facilities.

Moreover, cooperatives derive substantial benefits from guidance in care mapping, a strategic tool that aids in identifying the elderly, children, and individuals with disabilities requiring their services. Throughout the cooperative's formation and its initial operational year, comprehensive support proves essential. This assistance extends to crucial areas such as planning, administration, network cultivation, fortification, and the exchange of lessons from both accomplishments and setbacks.

Table 8. Interview passages on cooperative networks

<p>" (...) those who have been able to understand that it was also good, just as several caregivers and caregivers came together in a cooperative, that intercooperation and intercooperative work are also good for the recognition of the sector within the cooperative world and also towards the public policies of care of the State (...)" (39 year-old Argentinean member of a care cooperative).</p>
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Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

4.4. Challenges for the care cooperative work

This investigation shows that future difficulties will come in two different forms. First, the people interviewed in the three countries indicate that there is a need for a national care system that enables both culturally and technically appropriate education and training of the general public as well as caregivers. As these cooperatives combine many sorts of policy objectives, such as those for the elderly, children, gender, or decent employment (Mastronardi et al., 2020), it is crucial to understand the intersectionality of the issues they raise. For example, aligning with the findings from ECLAC (2017), the interviews reflect multiple instances where the pursuit of "decent work" within cooperatives is closely intertwined with the broader battle against the devaluation of women's labor beyond domestic confines. Similarly, the interviews conducted across the three analyzed countries highlight that the undertakings of care cooperatives symbolize a rallying point for tasks often disregarded by both the public sector, as elucidated by Hopp & Casparian (2021), and prevailing legislation. This pattern aligns with the observations of Mastronardi et al. (2020) regarding the private sector and the labor market.

The second challenge, illuminated by the quotes presented in Table 9, pertains to cultivating the cooperative's self-management capabilities. In this scenario, the role of the State shifts to providing early assistance in organizational management, with the cooperative members assuming clear roles in task allocation and execution. This process can be conceptualized as a form of "induced cooperativism," akin to approaches undertaken by cooperative incubators. In this model, the State advances initiatives that foster such collaborative endeavours, highlighting the advantages of cooperative ventures to groups of women approaching municipalities or other governmental bodies with aspirations of embarking on collective initiatives. These initiatives are underscored by the prospect of creating productive units collectively, coupled with the potential for accessing public financing.

One of the most relevant challenges described in the interviews lies in the importance of creating work teams in the cooperatives is highlighted when considering the facilitating aspects for both the cooperatives and the care system. The effectiveness of the creation of the cooperatives and their sustainability over time depends on the group's capacity to manage disagreements and frustrations that can occur inside the organization. Again, the methods and planning used to build these organizations become pertinent in this situation, encouraging systemic or group work and enabling cooperatives to operate at higher levels of self-management.

Table 9. Interview passages on challenges

<p>"(...) <i>it is</i> an important focus of State policies towards what is care, thinking about a care system(...)" (39 year-old Argentinean member of a care cooperative).</p>
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<p>"(...)it is something that is also about being able to develop, that capacity that groups can self-plan, self-organize and self-distribute their tasks, that finally the State is a support for that management, but finally the group is clear about how the task is distributed and how it is done(...)" (59 year-old Chilean social worker, trainer in cooperative incubator).</p>
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<p>"(...) I had the opportunity to meet groups of women who effectively cooperativized, but under the eaves of an incentive basically, from the promotion from the State, in this case, the local government, what is known as an induced cooperativism, was not of its own will, but finally they were raised the benefit of cooperativizing to a group of women who came to the municipality wanting to be able to undertake " (59 year-old Chilean social worker, trainer in cooperative incubator).</p>

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

When delving into the discourse surrounding the labor market, particularly considering the distinct political and economic contexts of each locale, interviewees from all three countries underscore the imperative of societal recognition for care work. This resonates particularly vividly in Chile, where it serves to engender awareness about the necessity of establishing a comprehensive care system that addresses the void within the labor market. Furthermore, the dialogues center on the imperative for the public machinery to devise a comprehensive care framework, thereby facilitating the coordination and consolidation of efforts from various stakeholders, notably professionals such as geriatricians, psychologists, and caregivers. Similarly, in contexts like Chile, a recurring theme is the absence of a centralized apparatus, resulting in a lack of receptiveness to the perspectives of families who are beneficiaries of these services. This aspect is pivotal, aligning with the foundational concept of "decent work" underpinning the genesis of cooperatives.

Another important element to consider is that the care cooperatives are created by the communities themselves, based on a common work in which the women caregivers decide who they want to take care of. The concept of a care system comes from feminist collectives that want to highlight the role of women in caregiving, which is important given that there is currently a debate in Latin America over the autonomy of those who are dependent or disabled. The foundational requirement for the formulation of these systems is the existence of a political agreement on the issue of care, which takes into consideration the latent risk of this type of policy regarding the institutionalization of the feminization of care. Each country may have its own system with its own particularities and political and territorial singularities.

Table. 10. Interview passages on challenges of cooperatives

"(...) these leaderships can generate two things, on the one hand that the leader opens to the formation and the incorporation of really a democratic scenario on the part of the bases, and on the other hand that the bases are encouraged to assume that commitment and that responsibility, which is to move from the idea that someone sends me and I obey and then I complain if they do not pay me, to say that I am also part of the decision-making and I am also part of the good and bad of this company, because if we do not stay in the idea of the boss, if we go barbaric is a spectacular manager or spectacular president, and if we do badly is all to blame (...)" (39 year-old Argentinean member of a care cooperative).

"(...) internal breaks end up being generated or sometimes they are lost within the dynamics of day-to-day work, it generates many services, a very complex dynamic, the link with the associates is lost and ruptures are generated (...). We generate tools on how this internal communication can be given, how to think about internal communication, how to think about assembly spaces." (39 year-old Argentinean member of a care cooperative).

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

On the other hand, it should be highlighted that while care systems provide some labor protections, they do not recognize care employment at the same social security level as other work since they equate the function of caretakers with that of domestic staff, placing pressure on funding and budgets. This happens because the care systems are tied to a particular demographic of white middle-class women who work for a salary and are not always tailored to the Latin American context, which is characterized by a high concentration of rural indigenous women, older people, and people who are dependent on others, among other things.

Finally, three issues that were thematized in the interviews are at the heart of the cooperatives' challenges for Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. First, there is a need for talented and compelling leaders who can open the working environment and inspire members' dedication in order to eventually forsake the logic of patronage. Second, it's critical to establish a balance between instruction in care activities and instruction in the cooperative dynamics because it's not enough to have someone who is technically competent in the provision of care services; it's also vital to teach strong cooperative teammates. Thirdly, a challenge for cooperatives to develop is to find and apply tools for internal communication.

4.5. Legislation of each country; the political and economic context of Uruguay, Argentina and Chile

Regarding the legislation that does or does not facilitate a national care system, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile the presence of the State is mentioned as a relevant factor, which through laws specifically recognizes care work. This recognition would support the continued existence of care cooperatives as well as the valorization of their tasks. For instance, there are two key issues in Argentina: first, there is no unique legal framework; instead, they are governed by a general rule that outlines the features that apply to all forms of

cooperatives. However, because each province implements its own home care law and because Argentina's administrative structure is governed by a federal state, only general guidelines for the implementation of care policies are provided from the central level. As a result, the scope of these policies is constrained. Additionally, one of the interviewees notes that while Argentina may be thought of as having an effective healthcare system, there are still issues because the institution in charge of providing gerontological services (PAMI) offers two main ways to receive assistance: through subsidies or by enrolling in the system after passing a series of tests. In view of this, officials see that although some older adults receive a subsidy and/or a pension, this is not enough for them to afford a caregiver, so they also allocate resources to find caregivers to help them two or three times a week.

Table. 11. Interview passages on legislation in Argentina

<p>" (...) cooperatives in Argentina do not have a special legal framework, only this general framework that mentions the general characteristics of cooperatives, the associative act, but that was a current law, very good legal technique, very recognized, but well, 50 years have passed " (39 year-old Argentinian member of a care cooperative).</p>
<p>"(...) But well, as nothing happens, as the regulations are supposed to be as Google says, as the websites of each of the institutions say, the boys and girls of the City Government pretend that they did not read anything, that they did not cross data and get them caregivers. But the caregivers go... Put her two or three times a week, which helps a lot, she helps with the tasks of daily life and what do I know (...)"(30 years-old Argentinian civil servant).</p>
<p>"This is a local government policy, it does not happen in the rest of the country, it will happen in some municipalities (...)"(30 years-old Argentinian civil servant).</p>

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

Uruguay is the country that serves as a reference or model for a national care system to be implemented in Chile. The Uruguayan model focuses on three areas of care: the elderly, people with disabilities and children. The great merit of Uruguay is that there is a state subsidy for caregivers, most of whom are women. The fact that women traditionally care for the home while men work outside the home helps to elevate caring as a profession by establishing legal recognition for it and providing caregivers with financial benefits. Although the interviewee recognizes that the subsidy does not represent a large economic contribution, she highlights the fact that providing it gives a monetary value to the service, which helps the community to value and recognize it as a job in its own right. In addition, she mentions that although there is a law on care, it is still deficient, insofar as there are multiple state entities that are legislating on the subject and implementing measures, which does not favor the organization of the policy.

Table. 12. Interview passages on legislation in Uruguay

<p>"Uruguay is the model for the national care system that Chile is trying to implement (...)" (45-year-old Uruguayan member of the board of directors linked to cooperatives)</p>
<p>"The good thing is that there is indeed a subsidy from the State for people who exercise care, who are often and overwhelmingly women, for multiple reasons. This historical fact has happened that women end up generating care at home while the man goes out to work, unfortunately that issue has been determined and has occurred, but somehow Uruguay takes it in its law, makes it flesh and generates a subsidy so that it is valued in a job (...)" (45-year-old Uruguayan member of the board of directors linked to cooperatives).</p>

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

Finally, with respect to Chile, it is mentioned that since last year the National Service for the Elderly (SENAMA) recognizes the day of the formal and informal caregiver, as an approach to recognize caregiving as a profession, that is, as a job that needs to be professionalized. However, the interviewee mentions that the State failed in proposing the National Care System for the first time since it was implemented with little knowledge regarding care work and promoting a "gender war" approach between men and women, leaving aside the perspective of collective and community care. In this sense, the interviewee's group implements

training and care programs because there is a public policy behind them. In addition, it is pointed out that although home care for the elderly exists, it has been installed slowly in the communes, partly because there is no exclusive financing for these tasks, which is an obstacle both for the formation of care cooperatives and for the development of other organizations that try to help and promote these tasks.

Table. 13. Interview passages on legislation in Chile

Director and spokesperson of mov. feminists: " Last year was the first year that the National Service for the Elderly recognizes the day of the formal and informal caregiver, which is an approach to recognizing care as a trade (...)" (58-year old Chilean lawyer and spokesperson of feminists movements).

Director and spokesperson of mov. feminists: "That is, in the idea of the national care system when Bachelet was a candidate, in the second period, and there the national care system is proposed for the first time. Its implementation was terrible, it was in the fourth year of government, zero knowledge, zero idea, the same ones who were implementing it in their speech said that men also had to care, zero understanding that it is not a war between men and women and that man takes care of the bus, but that we are talking about collective care, of how the community cares (...)" (58-year old Chilean lawyer and spokesperson of feminists movements).

Source: constructed by the author, based on the data collected

5. Discussion

The aforementioned findings highlight the challenges care cooperatives confront in fulfilling their goal of providing care services to the people that need them while also giving caregivers a respectable and well-paying job. Although care cooperatives give women a way to enter the workforce, they pose a challenge to establishing good and secure working conditions because they are associated with unstable types of employment. In this sense, the present investigation examines the challenges faced by care cooperatives in the southern cone of Latin America from three perspectives: gender, labour market, and political context.

In alignment with the insights gleaned from Flanders (2014), Nembhard (2014), Poo & Conrad (2015), and Savitch-Lew (2015), this research's principal accomplishment lies in its comprehensive exploration of the hurdles encountered by care cooperatives. Consistent with these authors' perspectives, prominent challenges surface, encompassing a dearth of training in administrative and organizational management, the intricacies of horizontal and democratic organizational structures, and the imperative for active engagement and participation from cooperative members. Furthermore, the findings of Iliopoulos et al. (2022), the results elucidate how these challenges pose a formidable obstacle for a demographic already constrained by limited leisure time, heightened vulnerability, and a pressing need for immediate resources. This prompts contemplation regarding the circumstances that cooperatives must contend with to emerge and sustain themselves in countries characterized by a lower propensity for public-private investment in care-related issues, as exemplified by Chile and Argentina. In this context, as delineated by Solís (2019), it becomes imperative to account for the cultural and day-to-day dynamics inherent to precarious contexts, including traditional work hierarchies, in which the author employs the concept of "patronage" to circumscribe the parameters of his findings.

For this motive the concept of a sustainable cooperative ecosystem is a growing area of attention for academic research. This is since connecting cooperatives with similar issues and requirements for different countries in the same region provides a mechanism to establish organizational networks and raises awareness of the care issue in precarious contexts. Inter cooperation and inter cooperative work are good tools for the recognition of the care sector, both within the cooperative world itself and regarding the State's public care policies, insofar as they serve as a means of support among the cooperatives themselves with tangible assistance to encourage the development of these networks.

Another of the difficulties faced by care cooperatives in establishing themselves as an organization, beyond the barriers inherent to the constitution of workers' organizations and the different existing regulatory frameworks, is related to the social valuation of care work (ILO 2018; Villanueva et al. 2020). Due to how heavily invisible gendered work is and how traditionally it is carried out on an informal (unpaid) level, organizations in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile find it difficult to convey the idea that these duties are compensated. This highlights the cultural aspect of the care issue as well as how the State, public policy, and

civil society support the value of care work and the requirement that males be held accountable for performing these tasks (ILO, 2015). In this way, the connection between social and economic valuation and how each influences the other becomes apparent. Because of the issues raised above, many cooperatives that are developed as a result of the necessity to discover ways to enter the labor market never progress past the "pre-cooperative" stage. By depending simply on the experience of cooperatives in general, a vicious spiral is created in relation to the lack of organizations that serve as references for the design of care cooperatives. However, when participants watch the cooperatives' organizations deteriorate over time, the inability to bring the cooperatives' operations under one umbrella frustrates them.

Care cooperatives, however, also present a chance to offer respectable employment or to enable the socialization of care work. Since women make up the majority of care cooperatives, this could promote the perpetuation of gender roles by linking this line of employment to women's issues (Díaz, 2015). This is a problem that is present in several initiatives that seek to allow women, generally adult housewives, to have some type of financing or remunerated activity, by making them responsible for domestic, care or child-rearing tasks (Cobo et al., 2012; Sugiyama & Hunter, 2020). Notwithstanding the above, In the event that care cooperatives are successful in establishing the economic valuation of care, this will empower the women who provide care, giving them a greater degree of personal autonomy. This could represent an opportunity for a long-term valuation of care work, which would allow this activity to become more attractive to men as well over time. This further emphasizes the significance of a gender perspective in public activities that comprehend the complexity of the phenomena and take into account the gender roles that are currently in place (Cobo et al., 2012; Sugiyama & Hunter, 2020).

In this same sense, the relevance of regulatory frameworks in facilitating or hindering the organization of care cooperatives can be observed. Although there are cases where there are specific regulatory frameworks on the issue of care and cooperatives, as is the case of Uruguay (Batthyány, 2015; Rico & Robles, 2016), the widespread reality in the continent is that care support policies are still in the implementation stage (Nieves & Rico, 2016; Batthyány, 2015). If we add to this the fact that the regulations of cooperatives are extremely different in each country, and most of them are outdated to current times (ILO, 2012; ICA, 2009), as well as the scarce integration between the different benefits and initiatives to support care (Batthyány, 2015), We can emphasize the necessity of improving the legal frameworks that permit the establishment of care cooperatives, their entry into the market, and the management of this type of organizations (Batthyány, 2015).

In addition to the existence of legislative frameworks that allow regulating, overseeing and supporting care cooperatives, coordination between public institutions and these cooperatives can be relevant when developing circular and social economy solutions (Camacho-Otero et al., 2018). The relationship between the requirements of the population that provides services and the one that uses them permits local development that links the advantages and goals of both sectors of the population, taking into account user experience as an element to be taken into consideration for the delivery of services (Iliopolus, et al., 2019; Lobato-Caballeros et al., 2022).

6. Conclusions

This project aims to delve into the experiences and perspectives of individuals affiliated with the realm of care cooperatives in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. Precisely, its focus is twofold: to delineate the potential catalysts and hindrances influencing the inception of these collectives, and to examine the challenges, prospects, and motivations that underscore their evolution. The project aspires to research a field of inquiry that has gradually receded from academic attention, specifically emphasizing the realms of caregiving and the underlying motivations, constraints, and facilitators inherent to these communal associations. This void in research pertains especially to nations within the Southern Cone, such as Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. To this end, a qualitative study encompassing 16 interviews across the three countries was conducted. These interviews were underpinned by a literature review that underscored three pivotal dimensions: gender-based disparities, the labor market milieu, and the overarching paradigm of "decent work." These thematic pillars served as the scaffolding for the interview guideline, after that the subsequent results were meticulously analyzed.

Facing the research question posed, which alludes to the conditions on which care cooperatives are established, it is worth making certain points made throughout the present investigation. In the first instance, it is worth noting that a specific method of balancing the various requirements of the populace is represented by care cooperatives in the three countries included in the research. On the one hand, they enable a wider and more accessible offer to be made to the population in need of care services, such as the elderly, individuals with impairments or dependents, and their families. On the other hand, these organizations allow people seeking to enter the labour market in a context of generalized labour precariousness and informality, to work in a remunerated manner with a horizon of better working conditions. Though, in countries with where a

precarious labour market and tough conditions to subsist care cooperatives struggle to become a viable choice given the wide range of population demands. These companies in countries like Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile struggle to develop into long-term sustainable businesses that give customers some level of assurance regarding the care services they receive.

Nonetheless, care cooperatives most of the time fail to create better employability conditions than those offered by the market, with low and sporadic remuneration for their members. Specifically, Argentina and Chile prevail in an institutional context that predominates a lack of specific legislation to regulate these organizations, the need for funding for these projects, and a lack of coordination between these organizations and other public initiatives to make their services visible. This is compounded by the challenges experienced in the three countries by those who join these organizations, who typically are vulnerable women with limited free time for active participation and little background in management or business organization. Therefore, despite the fact that their qualities could create an intriguing potential for the delivery of these services, care cooperatives now do not become a viable choice for offering better employment conditions or care services. This is due to the obstacles that arise in the creation of care cooperatives, the limited chances that its members have to create these organizations, and the chance they present to cater to the requirements of various population segments. This could be especially pertinent given that most of the members of these organizations are women who live in vulnerable or precarious situations and who see the care cooperatives as a chance for jobs, money, and empowerment in their environment.

Two pertinent areas for intervention are indicated in relation to the function of the State and public policies. In order to facilitate the establishment of this type of organizations, their regulation, and oversight, as well as to avoid acting as a barrier to their formation, it is crucial to provide an updated legal framework that takes into consideration the specificities of this type of organization. Second, the State needs to take an active role in assisting these organizations, at least in the process of creating care cooperatives; among other initiatives, funds could be made available for the establishment of these organizations, management or administrative training for their members, and coordination of the cooperatives with other State institutions, making the services provided by these organizations more accessible to the general public. These strategies could allow the cooperatives to become sustainable organizations with the use of resources, being able to coordinate the supply and demand of care services that are dispersed in the market and take advantage of existing economic opportunities.

Reviewing additional elements that support or hinder the development and upkeep of care cooperatives are required to inform future research directions and to shed light on regional variations in Latin America. The current study was able to point out how the creation of legislative frameworks on the topic could aid in the formation of these kinds of cooperatives, but further research would be required to determine what other elements would be crucial to their success. Furthermore, this study highlights three domains that need further investigation in the context of care cooperatives in Latin America. In this regard, the challenges intertwined with gender dynamics and cultural considerations, the intricacies of support mechanisms, the labor market, and the pursuit of "decent work" represent arenas ripe for ongoing investigation in the realm of social research. Such endeavors can engender fresh insights and more effective responses to the burgeoning demand for caregiving within the populace. Given the lack of successful instances on the continent, it is also important to look at examples of care cooperatives outside of Latin America, comparing them to situations there and examining the factors that contributed to their success.

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