# THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FAIRTRADE NETWORK TO CRITICAL PERFORMATIVITY IN COFFEE PRODUCER COOPERATIVES

## La contribución de la red fairtrade para la performatividad crítica en cooperativas de caficultores


**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this article is to analyze the influence of the Fairtrade network formation and articulation process on the critical performativity of coffee producer cooperatives. The study is based on a qualitative, exploratory, and interpretative approach based on the triangulation of semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documents for the construction of the case study carried out in a cooperative of Conilon coffee producers. The main results indicate that the insertion of the cooperative in the network promoted by Fairtrade allowed an expansion of its way of acting without the loss of identity, resisting the numerous pressures exerted by the other members, from democratic mechanisms that became engines to boost the critical performance of the organization. From the investigation, it is believed that the article advances in the discussion of critical performativity, showing that in alternative organizations such as cooperatives, this proposal challenges the proposition of simply questioning discourses and managerial practices, requiring a pragmatic intervention for the transformation of organizational reality.



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**RESUMEN**

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la influencia del proceso de formación y articulación de la red Fairtrade en la performatividad crítica de las cooperativas de productores de café. El estudio se apoya en un enfoque cualitativo, de carácter exploratorio e interpretativo fundamentándose en la triangulación de entrevistas semiestructuradas, observación no participante y documentos para construcción del estudio de caso realizado en una cooperativa capixaba (de Espírito Santo, Brasil) de productores de café Conilon. Los principales resultados señalan que la inserción de la cooperativa en la red promovida por Fairtrade posibilitó una expansión de su forma de actuación sin la pérdida de identidad, resistiendo a las innúmeras presiones ejercidas por los demás miembros, a partir de mecanismos democráticos que se convirtieron en motores para impulsar la performatividad crítica de la organización. A partir de la investigación, se cree que el artículo avanza en la discusión de performatividad crítica, por evidenciar que en organizaciones alternativas como las cooperativas, esa propuesta desafía la proposición de simplemente cuestionar discursos y prácticas gerenciales, necesitando una intervención pragmática para la transformación de la realidad organizacional.



**Keywords:** Fair trade; Cooperativism; Coffee

**Palabras clave:** Comercio justo; Cooperativismo; Café.


## 1 INTRODUCTION

The organized productive articulation in groups such as cooperatives has brought to the field of Organizational Studies new research that challenge the conventional theoretical lenses. Different conceptual prisms reveal nuances that had been overlooked by previous views that made superficial the knowledge produced and circulating in such enterprises, built and reconstructed for the survival of the current economic model (CEZAR; FANTINEL, 2018; LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014; PARANQUE; WILLMOTT, 2014). In this struggle for survival, the constant search to reconfigure itself as a hybrid organization (EBRAHIM; BATTILANA; MAIR, 2014), with multiple participatory spaces (HERAS-SAIZARBITORIA, 2014) and with alternative actions to the conventional ones (STOREY; BASTERRETXEA; SALAMAN, 2014),

instigated countless questions about the practices developed and implemented for the management of these enterprises.

In the search for balance in their economic and social dimensions, cooperatives have been oriented to a reinterpretation of their practices, management discourses and deconstruction of ingrained market ideologies, addressing what has been characterized in literature as Critical Performativity (SPICER; ALVESSON; KÄRREMAN, 2009, 2016). The performative reconfiguration of their activities leads the cooperatives to elaborate mechanisms of action that tend to expose organizational ambiguities, such as tensions, conversations, questionings and mainly the reflective process of the subjects, leading them to constantly question "fixed formulas" of management that can reinforce the structures of power (ALVESSON; SPICER, 2012; LEARMONTH *et al*., 2016).

Despite the fact that the cooperative doctrine assumes the formation of enterprises based on self-management, solidarity and participation (HERAS-SAIZARBITORIA, 2014) it is difficult to affirm that all cooperatives actually adopt these values and develop a performative intention (STOREY; BASTERRETXEA; SALAMAN, 2014). Marketing calls can make them oscillate for a proposal where certain practices are not questioned and where norms, values and orientations are hardly followed that do not agree with their proposal for an alternative enterprise (BURKE, 2010; PARANQUE; WILLMOTT, 2014). In this process, the articulation in solidarity networks has the potential to structure organizations that intend to sustain a new way of acting, resisting the pressures imposed by the market, as soon as they rely on the other links present in the configuration formed by these networks (RAYNOLDS; MURRAY; TAYLOR, 2004; VIEGAS, 2012).

The proposal to create new forms of work through cooperatives articulated in networks is present, for example, in the fair trade movement that, based on the Fairtrade certification, values the production, distribution and consumption of products in an ethical, solidary and sustainable way (STENN, 2013; TIBURCIO; VALENTE, 2007). By including producers in a fair and solidary commercialization network, Fairtrade has the potential to allow the members to exercise a more critical performativity, as long as mechanisms are developed so that the enterprises are not only adjusted to commercial and marketing desires. It is hoped that a sense of justice will be disseminated to all members present in the network (producers, traders and consumers) (KHAREL; MIDDENDORF, 2015; STENN, 2013).

In Brazil, Fairtrade has been very successful in bringing together coffee producers, most of whom export tons of the best products to Europe and the United States (OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; SANTOS, 2008; PEDINI, 2011). Coffee market is highly profitable and, because it increasingly demands a quality product, it encourages the substitution of small producers' production practices for more robust practices that can modify the production profile and the very identity of the enterprises (BURKE, 2010; GEIGER-ONETO; ARNOULD, 2011). If a more critical perspective of analysis on how to act is not developed among producers, certified enterprises can operate in an exclusively mercantile scenario that does not agree with the values of the cooperatives, much less with the values and ideologies of the fair-trade movement.

Considering, therefore, that the proposal for Fairtrade coffee certification has the potential to both encourage and restrict the actions of cooperatives, this article seeks to answer the following problem: ***How does the formation and articulation of fair-trade networks contribute to the critical performance of coffee cooperatives?*** Thus, the objective of this article is to analyze the influence of the process of formation and articulation of the Fairtrade network on the critical performance of coffee producer cooperatives. In order to weave possible answers, a qualitative research was developed, based on the case study, in a coffee producers' cooperative in the interior of Espírito Santo. The results, considerations and analysis of this research are presented in this article, which, in addition to this introduction, presents its theoretical framework, discussing institutionalized fair trade and the issue of critical performance in cooperatives. Afterwards, the methodological procedures, the main results and the conclusions of the study are presented.

## 2 INSTITUTIONALIZED FAIR TRADE BY THE FAIRTRADE NETWORK

Fair trade emerges as a movement capable of diminishing the asymmetries present in the market logic that feeds the current economic model (RAYNOLDS; MURRAY; TAYLOR, 2004; SCHMELZER, 2010; VAIL, 2010). According to Cotera and Ortiz (2009, p.60), fair trade can be understood as "the process of exchange of production-distribution-consumption, which looks for a solidary and sustainable development". Based on this definition, it is important to point out that fair trade brings to the surface the need to mediate the relationships between producers and consumers in an ethical way, both for those involved and for

the environment. The increase of justice relations to the trade conventionally guided in the capitalist market emerges as an attempt to provide access to new work possibilities, income and marketing, to groups of workers who are, many times, dismantled and who face countless difficulties in different areas of action (SYLLA, 2014).

The development of a fair trade where producers from the countries of the global south had the possibility of commercialization together with consumers from the north was carried out from a wide network between the countries of Europe and North America, interested in replacing the welfare relations by relations of solidarity, through economic exchanges (COTERA; ORTIZ, 2009). Fair trade initiatives emerged, then, after the Second World War and were led by American and European organizations that acted in the marketing of handmade products, such as embroidery made by refugees from the South (FRIDELL, G., 2006; FRIDELL, M.; HUDSON; HUDSON, 2008; RAYNOLDS; MURRAY; TAYLOR, 2004; SCHMELZER, 2010). Fridell, Hudson and Hudson (2008) point out that the products were gaining support, while the profits from their sale were directed to underprivileged families, thus creating a wide network known as ATO (*Alternative Trade Organization*). From then on, diverse experiences involving food products were developed around the world, through ATOs, as a means of promoting consumption for the sake of justice and equity (STENN, 2013).

The initial experience of product certification comes from 1988 and culminated in the creation of the first fair trade stamp from the development agency *Solidaridad*, creating the Max Havelaar stamp for coffee certification, which allowed the sale of Mexican coffee to Dutch supermarkets (FAIRTRADE, 2019). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Max Havelaar certification initiative gained notoriety in much of Europe and in some Asian countries and was then replicated in other markets. Thus, in 1997 *Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International* (FLO) was created in Bonn, Germany, uniting organizations linked to fair trade, in different national spheres, responsible for creating certification standards worldwide (FAIRTRADE, 2019)

For Cortera and Ortiz (2009), the union of all the initiatives in an international fair-trade stamp allowed them to work together in order to facilitate the export of the products of small producers distant in all their dimensions, from the big markets, in an attempt to reduce the inequality in the distribution of goods between North and South. The proposal of fair trade is becoming more pressing in a scenario of extreme inequality in the production and distribution of food (RAYNOLDS; MURRAY; TAYLOR, 2004). Feeding a chain in which all those linked to it are benefited and fair conditions of work and income are applied is an alternative. Despite the different paths and formats that fair trade can take, presenting itself also in its aspect of Solidarity Economy via exchange clubs, fairs, etc., the institutionalized emergence of this movement led to the creation of different certification stamps, guaranteeing the criteria of social justice.

Among the different stamps developed, the proposal led by the FLO is seen as the most successful because, over time, it allowed the creation of an extensive network of producers, distributors and traders around the world (COLE; BROWN, 2014). Nowadays, Fairtrade can be understood through a system of governance and certification. As a governance system Fairtrade is instituted by the FLO that regulates standards and behavior, building forums for collective discussion and learning. As a certification, Fairtrade is developed by a set of criteria developed by FLOCERT, carefully audited in the enterprises and in every chain of fair trade (FAIRTRADE, 2019; FLOCERT, 2019).

As far as the enterprises are concerned, the mechanisms developed by FLO allow food producers to be part of a production chain, with specific rules of operation and which are audited periodically (FLOCERT, 2019). Products such as cocoa, sugar and mainly coffee can only be produced by SPOs (Small Producers' Organizations)[1]. The rules for SPOs to be certified and to continue with the certification depend on the audits that consider majority criteria (indispensable) and development criteria (that must be improved). These criteria are constantly evaluated by the network of producers in each country who have the power to adapt some criteria to their local realities (SCHMELZER, 2010).

In Brazil, there are countless experiences of certification since the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s (BOSSLE *et al*., 2017; OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; SANTOS, 2008). Currently the country has 90 organizations certified by Fairtrade that produce, trade, distribute, manufacture or process different food[2] (FLOCERT, 2019). However, despite the progress in the certification of other products, coffee has a greater number of certified organizations, 51, with 31 classified as producer organizations only (FLOCERT, 2019).

[1]Organizations in which at least 50% of producers are considered family farmers.

[2]Coffee; herbs, herbal teas and spices; fresh fruit, honey, nuts, oulseeds and oleaginous fruit; pulp and; fruit juices

Politically and strategically these producers are part of a wide network, responsible for the maintenance and development of Fairtrade certification and for representing the political interests of the certified organizations in Brazil, organized by CLAC (Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers) and BRFAIR (Association of Fair Trade Producers Organizations of Brazil). CLAC is the representative body for small Latin American and Caribbean producers and BRFAIR is the Brazilian association that represents the interests of national Fairtrade producers (BRFAIR, 2019). CLAC forms specific product networks to strengthen them, such as the "Coffee Network" which adds 155 producer organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (CLAC, 2019). BRFAIR acts by identifying the demands of the SPOs and articulating strategies to strengthen the productive groups based on the particularities of each product (BRFAIR, 2019). In this way, more than representing the interests, the role of these organizations is to guarantee that the norms stipulated by FLOCERT are developed in the organizations, helping the work that must be verified later in the audits.

## 3 THE CRITICAL PERFORMATIVITY IN THE COOPERATIVES

Implemented fair trade in Fairtrade certification accredits enterprises whose management is taken collectively, giving strength to the associations and mainly to the cooperatives directed to small producers of the family agriculture (OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO; SANTOS, 2008; PEDINI, 2011), independent of the affiliation to the OCB (Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives) or to the Solidarity Economy. Cooperatives in particular, mediated by economic and social institutional logics, when they carry out their activities, distance themselves from the utilitarian conception of entrepreneurship as they allow the development of their local community (BURKE, 2010; HERAS-SAIZARBITORIA, 2014). This transcendence of objectives, according to Leca, Gond and Cruz (2014), must be pointed out by their solidarity and management principles, which dominate the market relations and their organizational boundaries. The authors emphasize that the imbalance of such principles may lead to irreversible tensions, given the dismantling of social values or the introduction of managerial ideologies without their correct adaptation to the cooperative movement.

Established with the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844, the principles that constitute modern cooperativism unfold in different aspects that constantly fight to avoid the degeneration of their ideologies, since the practices developed by some organizations are very distant from the doctrinal values (CHENEY *et al*., 2014; PARANQUE; WILLMOTT, 2014). In Brazil primarily, the so-called "traditional" cooperativism, instituted by the OCB, has been solely developing cooperatives since 1969, based on a more entrepreneurial model of cooperativism, rooted in different branches of action, with organizations equipped with structured governance mechanisms and increasingly sophisticated management tools. Solidarity Economy cooperativism, in turn, considers different formats beyond cooperatives, since it represents a popular cooperativism strongly organized since the 1990s by small productive groups as a means of survival of different groups marginalized in the formal labor market (FRANÇA FILHO, 2011; SINGER, 2002; WELLEN, 2012). Regardless of the format, this cooperative movement wishes to articulate production through undertakings that confront the capitalist model and allow for the socioeconomic development of the groups through self-management.

In theory, the cooperative movement preaches that the management of cooperatives should be marked by the balance between their economic and social aspects, not allowing one of the sides to stand out. As pointed out by Audebrand (2017), these enterprises coexist with countless paradoxical tensions that, however contradictory their logic of action may be, are always intertwined, fighting daily to consolidate themselves as a democratic association and economic enterprise. For the author, performance paradoxes are part of this complex management mechanism that suffers from the temptation to either develop a more objective mechanism, guided by robust performance metrics, like other mercantile organizations, or more complex social mechanisms, where this utilitarian vision of efficiency is reduced, and social values are incorporated.

Given the paradoxical nature that these organizations inhabit, to constantly reflect on their performance in favor of a performative action becoming necessary so that instrumental practices that suffocate their democratic reflexivity are not replicated (KING; LAND, 2018). Thus, the conception of critical performativity developed by Spicer *et al*. (2009) approaches the paradoxical dilemmas faced by cooperatives, given that for the authors, this concept can be characterized as the:

> [...] active and subversive intervention in management discourses and practices. This is achieved through affirmation, care, pragmatism, involvement with potentialities

> and a normative orientation. The commitment to management theories provides a way for Critical Management Studies (CMS) to create social change through productive engagement with specific management theories. (SPICER; ALVESSON; KÄRREMAN, 2009, p.538).

This active and subversive intervention recommended by the authors suggests that the micro-management practices, constantly adopted and said to be true, be questioned both in the literature and in the daily life of the organizations. However, in order for a critical reflection of the functional *modus operandi* to really occur, a constructive and non-deprecating argument drawn from critical management studies can indicate paths for more reflexive and less deterministic action (SPICER; ALVESSON; KÄRREMAN, 2016).

According to Aggeri (2017), the proposal of performativity studies is to understand reality not as something concrete, but as something built from pragmatic and intentional interventions. The current proposal of performativity inherits the contributions of John Langshaw Austin in his studies on performativity in acts of speech, of Michel Callon on the processes of performance of economic theories, and of Judith Butler on the construction of identity through performative acts of individuals (AGGERI, 2017; SPICER; ALVESSON; KÄRREMAN, 2009). In this way, the understanding of this performativity in organizations can be converted into something possible from three elements: 1) the elementary acts of language (speech, writing and metrics) repeatedly reproduced in specific contexts; 2) the devices of management, which directs the conduct of the governed based on strategic actions and; 3) the mechanisms of governance that drive the internal members for a transformation of reality (AGGERI, 2017).

With regard to cooperative enterprises, the intervention of the cooperative members in the daily organizational practices can encourage its members to constantly reflect and critically question the way in which the enterprise is carried out to produce its own reality, in the case of market demands and impositions (AUDEBRAND, 2017), enhancing beyond the market practices, the social aspect that is the basis of the enterprise (LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014; PARANQUE; WILLMOTT, 2014). In a complementary way, the conception of critical performativity sheds light on the need for a political approach of its members, in the sense of directing the organization to the real desires of its members and not just to become a strategic player in a network, which promotes its links to blindly meet the market impositions (CEZAR, 2018).

From the point of view of Critical Management Studies, academic reflections contribute to this active intervention as proposed by Spicer *et al*. (2009), however, some authors (FOURNIER; GREY, 2000; GOND *et al*., 2016) highlight the difficulty of a truly critical proposal to the functional mainstream. This thesis is reinforced by Cabantous *et al*. (2016) and King (2015), since the project of critical performativity still demands a structural and reflexive change of the values adopted by its members, built from the dialogical spaces.

In spite of the limitations, the reflexive project of critical performativity in cooperatives has been the guideline for several studies (AUDEBRAND, 2017; LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014; PARANQUE; WILLMOTT, 2014). These contributions highlight, respectively, the complexity of defining a truly critical pattern in the face of so many paradoxical tensions; the need for motors of performativity to encourage cooperatives to form and develop a critical orientation; and the difficulty of rescuing and maintaining the critical project through democratic mechanisms in large cooperatives. In this new wave of critical management studies, the focus on cooperatives in new theoretical conceptions does justice to the entanglement of guidelines that such enterprises offer for the construction of the field and that has the potential to open up innumerable debates (LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014).

## 4 METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a qualitative approach of exploratory and interpretative character, based on the triangulation of semi-structured interviews, non-participating observation, and documents for the construction of the case study. The exploration of the research by this way became essential to build and reconstruct the subjective reality exposed by the subjects (BANSAL, PRATIMA, KEVIN, 2011; CRESWELL, 2013; STEBBINS, 2001), from experiences and interactions with the organization studied and with the particularities of the fair trade movement where the productive group studied is inserted.

The case study was carried out over a period of two years (2017 and 2018) in the Caficultores del Sur del Estado de Espirito Santo Cooperative (CAFESUL), located in the city of Muqui, southern region of Espirito Santo State. According to the last census in 2010, the municipality has 14,396 inhabitants, 64.7% of whom live in urban areas and 35.3% in rural areas (IBGE, 2018). The organization was created in 1998, is part of the OCB model of cooperativism and it has about 150 cooperative

members, 11 officials and joined the Fairtrade certification in 2008. Currently, the organization is the only Fairtrade certified coffee producer cooperative in Espírito Santo and the first in Brazil to be certified with the Conilon variety of coffee (FLOCERT, 2018a).

Since it represents a unique case in Brazil, the interest in the research of this organization started from the assumption that the reality lived by its members is part of a very particular universe as an organization (STEBBINS, 2001). This scenario is explained by the particularity of the product (coffee of the Robusta species and Conilon variety) that is seen as inferior to the other species (Arabica coffee) (FONSECA *et al*., 2015) and by the difficulty of developing a more critical orientation, since there is a tendency for the organization to be homogenized to the practices of strictly commercial organizations given the very profile of coffee growing that is dominated by highly commercial ventures and regulated by aggressive market rules.

To understand this reality, 46 interviews were conducted with members of the cooperative (officials, advisors and cooperative members), support and training organizations (members of OCB-ES, INCAPER, SEBRAE and SENAR), coordinating organizations (members of BRFAIR and CLAC), and the state government (representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Supply, Aquaculture and Fisheries of Espírito Santo - SEAG) and local (members of the Secretariat of Agriculture and Environment and municipal Mayor), local financial institutions (Banco do Brasil, SICOOB and CRESOL) and traders (representatives of two companies that market CAFESUL coffee). The observations were carried out in the cooperative's facilities, in the farmers' rural properties and in some cafeterias in the city of Vitória-ES. Regarding the documents, minutes of meetings and social statutes were used, as well as normative documents from FLOCERT and CSC (Coffee Sustainability Curriculum).

Interviews, field diaries produced from the observations and documents were analyzed with the help of the Atlas.ti® software based on content analysis for data interpretation. The process of analysis was carried out in three stages: 1) Reading of the data (reading of all the material collected and produced); 2) Descriptive coding (creation of the first codes from fragments of the material); 3) Analytical categorization (approximation of the common codes and creation of categories that described the set of codes) and 4) Theoretical categorization (approximation of the analytical categories to the theoretical framework of the research).

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 The formation of the network from the moments lived by the cooperative

The emergence of CAFESUL happened amidst countless demands from rural producers in Muqui, who, situated in a small city with few technological resources, saw over time the production of coffee being sold at a low cost to intermediaries in the region. The city developed around a train line, which for years facilitated the work of the intermediaries, to filter the coffee they bought directly from the producers and then resell it. This practice, however, made the formation of associations and cooperatives in the municipality unfeasible for some time. It was only in 1998 that the union of producers led to the constitution of CAFESUL, as evidenced in the following lines:

> [...] The cooperative emerged in 1998, with a group of 20 producers of Muqui mainly and the intention was to actually market together, right, and buy together. Only from 1998 to 2002 it remained practically stagnant, that is, it existed on paper, but it did not exist in operation. From 2002 onwards there was even a discussion at that time about whether or not to close the cooperative. A group of producers decided to take over, so I was already part of it to see if the cooperative would start walking [...]. (President).

> [...] The idea was to create an alternative market [...] (Cooperative member 1).

The cooperative was already developed in the OCB's cooperative format, assuming the minimum number of 20 members required by the legislation, when the proposal was initially viewed with much distrust by the local public. Since its constitution, the focus, in fact, was the joint purchase and access to an alternative market as evidenced in the statements, because the traditional market of Conilon coffee was always considered in the region, as low added value and dominated by intermediaries.

The initial difficulties that led to the stagnation of the cooperative from 1998 to 2002, reflect the management profile of the former Board of Directors that saw a very commercial proposal for CAFESUL. This proposal, however, did not match the real interests of producers who wanted another type of enterprise, as evidenced in the statement below:

> [...] he [*the former manager*] had a very big vision and he was passing on some of that to the members, that this was going to be transformed into a mega cooperative and that is not the case. If we are small, the cooperative has to be small, if we are a group of low-income members, with low production because our limits are limited in this case, it has to be a small cooperative, but it has to be self-sustaining, for its movement and also for the life of those who are out in the countryside. [...] (Cooperative member 5).

It is notable in the statement of the cooperative member the dissatisfaction with the directions that the cooperative was following, while approaching the proposal of a mercantile company that would continue the activity of simply reselling the producers' coffee, adding nothing different in benefit of the so desired alternative market. This more commercial position is corroborated in the statement of one of the officials:

> [...] at the beginning we were already beginning to see the cooperative more as a coffee intermediary, more as a coffee merchant, and we did not see much more to offer the producer [...] we were going to be one more in the market and the coffee market, the way we were going, would end up being swallowed up by the big companies [...] (Official 7).

With the intention of reconstructing the original proposal of a differentiated organization that would avoid the figure of the intermediaries, a new Board of Directors was elected and with it was added the proposal for Fairtrade certification. The proposal for CAFESUL's certification arose from the indication by a member linked to the municipal public power in a turbulent period of change in the organization's position, both to survive and to try to position itself again as an enterprise.

By participating in talks and events promoted directly by members of the FLO, CAFESUL members themselves perceived that the proposal of fair trade was aligned with the interests of the organization. The proposal of fair trade in structuring the economic, social and environmental perspective in the entire system of production, distribution and consumption of coffee was possible to be developed in the organization, since many of the demands were already made by the producers before the standards were known.

Hence, as of 2008 the cooperative began the certification process, causing some internal tensions, aiming at compliance with Fairtrade standards as highlighted in the statement below:

> [...] it was the most complex moment for the cooperative because it had 540 members and it changed to 127 [...] I visited those people with a form in my hand asking if they wanted to accept those certification standards, if they would enter it or not, in case they said no, that there would be a lot of difficulty, they would have to sign a term desisting from being a cooperative member (Member of INCAPER)

According to the declaration of the INCAPER member who was an official of the cooperative at that time, this complex certification process created some internal conflicts, reducing the volume of cooperative members by 24%, but it did allow the separation of those who were interested in investing in the new organizational format.

Despite these tensions, CAFESUL obtained Fairtrade certification, becoming part of a broader network that, politically, began to structure its political, social, commercial and strategic interests. This insertion also made it possible to link up with BRFAIR which, through its democratic instances with the other members of certified enterprises in Brazil, allows, in joint work with CLAC, to articulate local interests and to align the norms stipulated by FLOCERT to the national reality, in addition to guaranteeing the strengthening of the Coffee Network. In this network, the FLO is responsible for defining the certification standards and support mechanisms for producers. FLOCERT , in turn, is responsible for inspecting, certifying, and auditing producers' and traders' organizations. (FAIRTRADE, 2019).

In an extended way, the integration in the Fairtrade System allowed the desire of CAFESUL producers to be addressed, since it connected the cooperative directly to the traders. The cooperative still does not have sufficient infrastructure to carry out direct exports, making it necessary for certified traders to sell. These traders set parameters for the purchase price of Conilon coffee based on the highest value: payment by the market (based on the London Stock Exchange quotation) or the minimum price stipulated by FLOCERT. The minimum price is a security mechanism that guarantees that production costs are paid, and that the producer will not sell his or her coffee at derisory prices. In these paid values, Fairtrade stipulates a fixed value (remunerating beyond the value paid for the products) known as the Fairtrade Premium, whose application in terms of use is decided democratically and formalized in the Fair Trade Development Plan (FTDP) (FLOCERT, 2019).

As the cooperative over time expanded its activities and structured itself around increased coffee sales volume and use of the Fairtrade Premium, countless members

also became necessary. Each member takes on a specific function that coincides with the interests of the organization, which democratically defines its course in assembly, together with the co-operators and advisors. Among the main members, the municipal and state government spheres, responsible for promoting access to resources through parliamentary amendments for financing the cooperative's infrastructure, initially stand out. In addition, local financial institutions (Banco do Brasil, CRESOL and SICOOB) promote credit for producers, support cooperative infrastructure projects (through the Banco do Brasil Foundation) and provide producers with access to public credit policies such as PRONAF. Similarly, support organizations linked to the S System, such as SENAR-ES, SEBRAE and SESCOOP-ES, in addition to INCAPER, which is directed to Rural Extension, are personally responsible for training with respect to production processes, management practices and training in cooperativism.

Both the government spheres and the support and training institutions work in partnership with the OCB-ES in promoting resources for the organization or for training. Indirectly, the training offered by the different institutions prepares the organization to adapt to the norms that are audited by FLOCERT and accompanied by CLAC. In addition, the training allows producers and the cooperative itself to become better organized and to offer traders better quality coffee.

The network formed by these multiple actors described, is arranged in Figure 1.

From Figure 1 it is possible to notice that the relationships established directly are expressed by the continuous arrows and the indirect relationships are expressed by the dotted arrows.

### 5.2 Resisting institutional pressures to ensure balance

The structuring of the network outlined above creates a system that, as mentioned by Viegas (2012, p.119), depends directly "on an alternative vision to the traditional view of the economic system based on positive expectations regarding values — such as reciprocity, trust and reputation — often overlaid by opportunism". The typical imbalance of these organizations is present in CAFESUL, as institutional pressures oscillate the enterprise sometimes for a more economic side, stimulated by traders, other times for a more political side, stimulated by the government spheres.

Traders are currently represented by two large coffee companies that are also Fairtrade certified. With headquarters in São Paulo and Paraná, respectively, these companies have a local office in Vitória-ES, whose objective is to identify and certify the characteristics of the product delivered to them and the possible consumer markets. However, as the consumer market determines its own quality characteristics, traders try at all costs to encourage better quality standards to producers, as exemplified in the statements below:

> [...] I believe that certification should be more widely sold in the market, at least it seems that way, because, for example, if it were commercial, other cooperatives would be doing it too. So, I understand that a fault line is really in Fairtrade, in who is doing the certification [...] so, I think there is a fault line in that process too, maybe because of the quality, I do not know. I think that quality is one of the ways that you make quality coffee. Do you know what it means to make quality Conilon and where does the coffee go? It is difficult [...] (Trader 1).

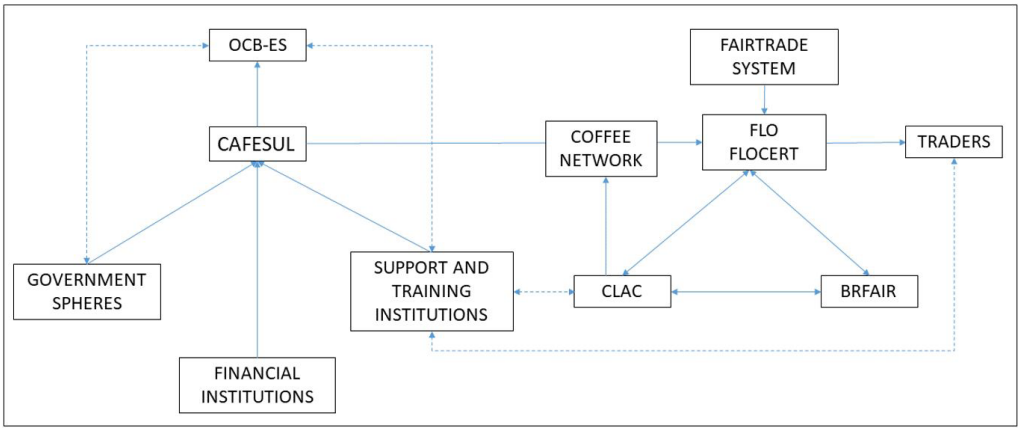


**FIGURE 1** − Network formed by the cooperative from Fairtrade
Source: Elaborated by the authors (2019)

Due to the trader's statements and extensive conversations and field observations, quality Conilon coffee still represents a taboo for the market, which associates these characteristics more with Arabica coffee. The reasons for the purchase of such coffee by traders are not associated with the fairness standards stipulated by Fairtrade, but the fact that they are certified and constantly audited ensures fair practices with producers. However, even though they believe it is "difficult" to produce quality Conilon, they market all the coffee, filtering it for export and for the domestic soluble industry.

In addition to pressuring the cooperative and consequently the producers to achieve a quality standard that is not stipulated by Fairtrade but is demanded by traders in response to the market, these actors also pressure the organization to change its production characteristics. For traders, it would be advantageous for the cooperative to initially change varieties and produce Arabica coffee, as well as increase its membership by expanding its activities to other cities.

The cooperative, however, resists and defends its identity as a producer of quality Conilon coffee, even though that task is fraught with prejudice. Changing the fragile image of Conilon is not a quite easy task. This rupture of paradigms is a banner that the cooperative raises daily, mainly in the events it participates in, trying to deconstruct the negative image around its product. In the observations made during the meeting to review Fairtrade standards, it was possible to note how complex it is to seek recognition as a certified Conilon producer organization, compared to the other Arabica coffee producer organizations:

> [...] At the end of the meeting, everyone went to the Escola da UFLA Cafeteria to taste coffees of BRFAIR's members. In the cafeteria, during the whole week the week of the fair trade took place, and the certified coffees were widely divulged and commercialized. Arriving at the cafeteria he [president], enthusiastically, indicated that everyone should try the coffees Póde Mulheres and Casario. Many, who were curious, said: - Ah, I want to see that one. Apparently, they found the Conilon Especial coffee strange among the other Arabica coffees. One of the producers tried it and said: - Oh, it tastes like roasted peanuts. Apparently, he didn't like it very much. Others, surprised, praised the coffee a lot [...] (Field Diary 8).

The fragment extracted from the field journal shows how difficult it is to seek legitimacy in a group where the market accessed is different from the others, despite sharing the same interests regarding the product.

The cooperative's action in defending the identity of its producers points to the differentiated proposal of the enterprise which, regardless of how appealing it is to the profitable appeals of the market, does not succumb to the totality of their desires. As quality standards are stipulated, the cooperative offered subsidies for its producers to seek to achieve them, but it is aware that it will not change its profile of activities and its production culture to meet the interests. To break the paradigms of Conilon coffee, the cooperative launched two brands of coffee, one produced by women (PóDe Mulheres) and the other that carries the cultural characteristics of the colonial houses of the city (Casario).

As far as the government spheres are concerned, because they mediate the collection of funds for the cooperative, mainly through parliamentary amendment, they take public action, as highlighted in the statement below:

> [...] CAFESUL is a cooperative in both a private and public vision, case in point. It has received many parliamentary amendments, both from teams, as it did recently, I signed a coffee roasting industry, through parliamentary amendment, but that is only done because people see a particularly good job done by him [president] and by the CAFESUL team. Because public money is expensive for us to put in the hands of people who do not have the commitment to give answers to society [...] (Undersecretary of SEAG).

According to the Undersecretary's analysis, the cooperative represents an example for the state that justifies the investment, however, it is also seen as a public service provider. Even though the cooperative is less vocal in its efforts to collect fees, it has had to offer services to non-cooperative members (as observed in several talks and training sessions) by offering quotas for local rural producers to participate in the organization's training sessions and talks, thus complying with public authority requirements.

### 5.3 The impulses given to act in the network

Faced with the innumerable influences it receives from the interests of the actors in the network formed, the cooperative seeks to resist in its organizational and cultural practices, thus developing its critical orientation. It can be said that the critical orientation in the enterprise is developed by two "motors of critical performativity". According to Leca, Gond and Barin Cruz (2014), the motors of critical performativity are defined as a mechanism

that produces bodies of alternative knowledge responsible for encouraging the different members of the cooperatives to reflect on more critical forms of management, where the work process, the developed relationships and their different senses can be constantly analyzed in favor of the balance between their logics of action.

Being the cooperatives a proposal of alternative organization for the conventional practices of management (CEZAR, L.; FANTINEL, 2018), the motors of critical performativity act in such a way that they protect their principles and their specific practices, since they are in a throbbing economic scenario (CHENEY *et al*., 2014). These engines, despite stimulating the creation of cooperatives based on predefined models (legal requirements, norms and procedures of governmental bodies or based on other enterprises of the same nature), allow for adaptations to these structures, creating mechanisms so that the cooperativist ideals are maintained, thus developing networks of intercooperation (LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014). These networks replicate their orientation and their form of management, allowing performance not to be summarized to individual practices restricted only to one organization, but to circulate among the network (FLECHA; NGAI, 2014). Intercooperation orientation, as a cooperative principle, develops as a positive effect of the motors of critical performativity, which reinforce this and the other principles, besides balancing the economic and social logics of the organization.

Thereby, two engines of critical performativity can be found in CAFESUL: an endogenous engine represented by the OCB-ES system and an exogenous engine represented by Fairtrade. Both play three fundamental roles for more critical developments in the organization: 1) Facilitation role; 2) Relational role and; 3) Knowledge management role (LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014).

The *facilitation role* played by OCB-ES as a critical performance engine is related to the development of its own methodology for the promotion of cooperatives, permitted by Law No. 5764/71. By developing CAFESUL since its constitution in the molds of traditional cooperativism, the OCB-ES had the potential to implement a specific methodology for the articulation of the organization's productive group, instituting mechanisms that would allow the transfer of knowledge about cooperativism to the group. The OCB-ES has accompanied CAFESUL since its constitution, working directly on the alignment of the organization with respect to both its economic and social guidelines, based on a specific ideology. As pointed out by Leca, Gond and Barin Cruz (2014), the production of an alternative knowledge for the specificities of the cooperative system allows not only to reduce the managerial excesses derived from capitalism, but to modify the way of doing management from its democratic performance.

Similarly, the facilitating role played by Fairtrade allowed the cooperative to set up a set of rules and procedures that strengthened the cooperative principles in the organization. By ensuring democratic management in the enterprise, Fairtrade enables the members of the organization to build together the PDCJ, which has become a guide for the management of the cooperative. This assessment of democratic management as a requirement audited by the certification guarantees that questions about cooperatives are transferred to the members, based on a specific methodology implemented each year of certification. This methodology represents, as pointed out by Aggeri (2017), concrete forms of elementary acts of language, expressed through writing, in which the agency involved for its implementation in the daily organizational life allows to transform the reality of its members, as in the case of rural producers.

The *relational role* developed by OCB-ES is linked to the possibility of articulating CAFESUL in a network of cooperatives inserted in the same system. By joining the OCB-ES, the cooperative is automatically part of an organized system that promotes it in all its dimensions and allows, in a punctual way, the connection of it with organizations of the same sector. In addition to inserting the cooperative into a broad system, the OCB-ES, through the events it develops or external events where it encourages the participation of CAFESUL members, allows the organization to connect with the coffee scene and, especially, with the Brazilian coffee cooperative scene. This network, both internal and external, allows the organization not only to identify new markets and learn about new production technologies, but also to understand the mechanisms used by other cooperatives in the same industry to avoid the drift of the social mission (BATTILANA; LEE, 2014).

The relational role can be seen in the development of the Fairtrade producers' network, established by BRFAIR for Coffee Network developed by CLAC. Since the Fairtrade methodology is universal and specific only to the product where the cooperative is certified, CAFESUL, upon certification, is part of a wide network of certified organizations. Participating in this network, the cooperative internally forms part of a group whose demands, orientations, deliberations, and rules are collectively discussed by the association with BRFAIR, characterizing, as Aggeri (2017) points out, management devices that act strategically for the success (or not) of the practices described.

The incorporation of CAFESUL in a national association of Fairtrade producers allowed it to know the reality of other coffee organizations, thus allowing it to share difficulties, management practices and mainly mechanisms of democratic construction for the alignment of social objectives of the organization with the commercial ones.

BRFAIR has the direct potential to connect CAFESUL with other alternative knowledge bodies such as universities (LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014). During the research, BRFAIR established a partnership with researchers from two universities (UFLA and UFV) to promote research both in specific areas of coffee cultivation and in the management of certified enterprises, as recorded in the following document:

> [...] After the meeting, BRFAIR, UFLA and CLAC identified three major lines of work that could be developed as Projects: 1 - Climate Change / Organic Production, 2 - Management of Cooperatives / Associations (including Strategic Planning) 3 - Internal Market Study (Fairtrade Market Potential together with Consumer Profile and - how to develop the internal market focused on the consumption of Fairtrade coffees) [...] (BRFAIR, 2018, p.3)

Each of these alliances allows to produce new forms of alternative knowledge so that CAFESUL maintains its critical orientation and does not have to adopt management devices that do not consider its paradoxical nature (AGGERI, 2017; AUDEBRAND, 2017).

With the network structure, the cooperatives inserted in the OCB-ES system and in the Fairtrade system adopt the same management methodology, allowing the exercise of the knowledge management role as a critical performance engine. In this sense, this role can be understood in the perspective of Aggeri (2017), as a governance mechanism that illustrates the incremental changes that are permissible from the intervention of management. The knowledge produced by OCB-ES is implemented both through its direct action guiding CAFESUL, and through the training of cooperators, advisors and employees carried out by SESCOOP-ES. The methodology developed at the national level is now circulating among the cooperatives in the system, and each branch is equipped with management tools, training, and specific guidelines. The development proposal brought by OCB/ SESCOOP-ES allows for the outline of training courses that are adequate to the reality of the organization, considering its management peculiarities, its governance characteristics, and the profile of the workforce.

Concerning Fairtrade, the role of knowledge management is carried out from the moment that this network structure allows the socialization of knowledge implemented by the standards common to all enterprises (LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014). As throughout the years of certification, the norms have increased the precision in relation to certain social, environmental, and economic practices exercised by the cooperative, the projects included in BRFAIR are monitored by CLAC. CLAC works together with BRFAIR, preparing rural producers for audits and allowing them to participate in the redefinition of standards. This monitoring and the possibility of democratic participation guarantee the maintenance of the cooperative's organizational structure, as they show producers that the development of standards can be adjusted according to the reality they live in their local context.

Thus, in spite of the pressures, the cooperative manages to develop its own critical performativity, since it has engines that drive it to bring the social issues that mark its identity to the center of discussion, removing the marginality that capitalist organizations give to these issues (ALVESSON; SPICER, 2012). This exchange between organizations at the local and global level, building a body of alternative knowledge and a form of critical performance, allows the proposal of critical performance engines to reach the public relevance defended by Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman (2016), because it articulates the theoretical knowledge produced by universities, by the OCB-ES and by Fairtrade with the practical knowledge experienced by the members of the companies.

## 6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this article was to answer how the formation and articulation of fair-trade networks contributes to the performance of coffee producer cooperatives. From the study it was possible to note that the formation of the network directly influences whether the cooperative adopts a more commercial, more social stance or whether there will be balance. In the case analyzed there was balance, since, from the beginning, the presence of a performativity engine (OCB-ES) ensured that the organization adopted its own management model, adapting its particularities and the desire to access an alternative market, as demanded by the producers.

Likewise, the articulation of the fair-trade network in a broader way, with well-defined actors and roles, based on the Fairtrade certification, allowed the expansion of its way of operation without losing its identity, resisting

countless pressures. The role of democratic articulation provided by the Fairtrade instances allows the cooperators to critically reflect on their performance in the network and to question the standards implemented. This democratic articulation leads to active reflection on how to carry out the organization's objectives in a less divisive and monopolistic direction (KING; LAND, 2018).

This article advances in the discussion of critical performativity proposed by Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman (2009, 2016), by evidencing that in alternative organizations such as cooperatives, this proposal challenges the proposition of simply questioning discourses and management practices as in the other organizations already researched. Since they are guided by engines of critical performance (LECA; GOND; BARIN CRUZ, 2014) the cooperatives inserted in the network perform critically in scenarios institutionalized by well-defined market rules, as in the case of Fairtrade. Although Fairtrade as a certification is configured as a predetermined and normative mechanism that can restrict the freedom of the subjects in the organization, its methodology acts in the opposite direction, allowing the circulation and reflection of networked knowledge by the members present in their chain. However, even guaranteeing a homogenization of the product delivered, given the demands of the market, it does not prevent the cooperatives from defining their identity.

Despite the limitations found in this research with respect to the perceptions of the other links in the chain (such as the local community, the final coffee consumers and the other representatives of the institutions that articulate the network), this article contributes to the discussions of solidarity networks in particular contexts such as cooperatives. It is revealed from this study that the performative manner of management, action, and intervention in the socioeconomic and political guidelines of the cooperatives is a reflection of the pressures it receives from the network formed. Such pressures, if not critically reflected, can compromise the critical design of these enterprises and, consequently, their alternative proposal of action.

Future studies can point to the firmness of the relationships present in the network, the intervention role of non-articulated members in the institutions and the existence or not of power asymmetries on the part of the members that the cooperatives collect. At the same time, research exploring these issues in non-certified fair-trade networks can also point to new developments and more dense discussions that contribute to the discussion of solidarity networks.

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