

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CO-OPERATIVES: THE CASE OF  
WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVES IN IZMIR

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OF WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVES IN IZMIR**

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**I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CO-OPERATIVES: THE CASE OF WOMEN’S CO-OPERATIVES IN IZMIR**

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In last the few decades, the current multi-layered crises and their gender dimension have been widely criticized by many activists, social movements, and scholars. Starting from the criticisms, the possibility of the imaginary economic and social organizing has been researched and investigated through various methods and principles. In this thesis, the feminist post-development has been discussed, following the pathways of the social solidarity economy (SSE) framework, as envisioned and tangible cases, as one of the critical approaches to development.

This thesis aims to analyze how and to what extent women's co-operatives have the potential capacity to create a new path towards women's empowerment and gender equality within SSE framework. Therefore, I focus on women’s empowerment and gender equality, creating an alternative organization of work, and transformative agendas from local through women’s co-operatives.

Seeking the alternative models, potentials, and limitations to create alternatives will be evaluated by their challenges, obstacles, strategies, alliances, and achievements. In

this thesis, it is claimed that women's co-operatives from the SSE framework create a variety of models to support and strengthen women's empowerment and gender equality, democratizing work, and transformative agendas from the local.

**Keywords:** Women's Co-operatives, Social Solidarity Economy, Women's Empowerment, Democratizing Work, Transformative Agendas

## ÖZ

### KOOPERATİFLER YOLUYLA KADINLARIN GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİ: İZMİR KADIN KOOPERATİFLERİ ÖRNEĞİ

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Yüksek Lisans, Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Çalışmaları Bölümü

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Son birkaç on yılda, mevcut çok katmanlı krizler ve bunların toplumsal cinsiyet boyutu birçok aktivist, toplumsal hareket ve bilim insanı tarafından geniş çapta eleştirildi. Eleştirilerden hareketle, hayali ekonomik ve sosyal örgütlenmelerin olasılığı çeşitli yöntem ve ilkelerle araştırıldı ve incelendi. Bu tezde, kalkınmaya eleştirel yaklaşımlardan biri olarak, tasavvur edilen ve somut vakalar olarak sosyal dayanışma ekonomisi (SDE) çerçevesinin yollarını izleyerek, feminist kalkınma sonrası teori tartışıldı.

Bu tez, kadın kooperatiflerinin, SDE çerçevesinde kadınların güçlendirilmesine ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik yeni bir yol oluşturma potansiyeline nasıl ve ne ölçüde sahip olduğunu analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu nedenle, kadınların güçlendirilmesine ve cinsiyet eşitliğine, alternatif bir çalışma organizasyonu yaratmaya ve yerelden kadın kooperatifleri aracılığıyla dönüştürücü gündemlere odaklanıyorum.



Alternatif modeller, alternatifler yaratmak için potansiyeller ve sınırlamalar aramak, zorlukları, engelleri, stratejileri, ittifakları ve başarıları ile değerlendirilecektir. Bu tezde, SDE çerçevesindeki kadın kooperatiflerinin, kadınların güçlendirilmesini ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini, çalışmayı demokratikleştirmeyi ve yerelden dönüştürücü gündemleri desteklemek ve güçlendirmek için çeşitli modeller oluşturduğunu iddia edilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadın Kooperatifleri, Sosyal Dayanışma Ekonomisi, Kadın Güçlenmesi, Çalışmayı Demokratikleştirme, Dönüştürücü Gündemler

*To all the women who work together to build a better world...*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIRIEC	International Center of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Co-operative Economy
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FSWW	Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (Kadın Emegini Değerlendirme Vakfı)
ICA	International Co-operative Alliance
ILO	International Labor Organization
KSGM	General Directorate of Women's Status (Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RIPESS	Red Intercontinental de promoción de la Economía Social Solidaria (Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy)
SSE	Social Solidarity Economy
TUIK	Turkish Statistical Institute (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu)
UN	United Nations
UNTFSSSE	UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

After the World War II (WWII), the concept of development expressed by U.S. President Harry S. Truman in his presidential speech was put forward to the political level as an ultimate goal for most nations across the globe (Truman, 1949). Giving the political missions to the U.S., Truman described it as a necessary project on which most nations depend on (Escobar, 2007). While the concept of development attracted attention, that of underdevelopment also emerged. Gustavo Esteva (2007) stated that with Truman's speech, two billion people became to consider underdeveloped in a day. Thus, the developed/undeveloped dichotomy was created.

In 1960, Walter Whitman Rostow's efforts to theorize growth as an economic development was one of the first studies to support the expansion of the economic dimension on the development process. With the efforts of Rostow (1960) and more, it was expected that most growth and development-dependent nations would be successful within a single development model. Thus, it was theorized which universal model should be followed to reach development and how.

This great intention for the growth-oriented development approach was reinforced by the international financial institutions and international development agencies across the globe. However, their development-oriented programs in dealing with poverty, inequalities, and crises have failed. In the last decades, economic crises within countries, global financial crisis, ecological degradation and food insecurity with the climate crisis resulted in a devastating inequality across the globe. Furthermore, these crises have triggered further crises, such as conflicts, mass displacements, extreme poverty, urban poverty, a greater gender gap, etc. More recently, an unexpected global

health crisis, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, has turned into a systemic and prolonged crisis that caused devastation on many levels. Such a crisis demonstrates the fragility of the system with its unpredicted long-term results on well-being, employment, and more triggering issues.

The effort to promote development has begun to be criticized with the intensified debates of the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, the vital importance of these criticisms is increasingly emphasized. Because in systemic impasse, new goals, namely Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting sustainable growth to reduce poverty and inequalities (Dacheux & Goujon, 2011) have failed to put forward appropriate solutions to the crisis. Today, these critiques of the growth-oriented development approach have increased and become vital to find new alternatives, especially for those suffering from the system. In this thesis, I focus on the post-development approach to seek alternatives.

From the post-development theory, the alternatives are expected to advocate pluralist grassroots movements from the local rather than the international organizations (Escobar, 1995). Development, considered as a discourse, has criticized its Western-Eurocentrism (Ziai, 2004). In this direction, the diversity and pluralism of developments are celebrated against the imposition of growth with paramount steps toward development.

Without any opposition to progress, the post-development approach introduced a new paradigm compatible with humans and nature against the eradication of pluralism, local and indigenous cultures, and knowledge. In the lines with this theoretical background, I follow that of the Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) which arose from the practice.

The SSE can be defined as social and economic practices that are democratically structured on the basis of shared values and principles. It refers to a variety of models, rather than universal models. The SSE, in contrast to for-profit entities, proposes different visions of production and redistribution relationships, management and

governance processes. Its actors are cooperatives, fair and solidaristic trade, rural workers, community organizations, ecological producers, agroecology, commons, and solidarity economy networks (RIPESS, 2015, p. 7). These actors operate in various forms from different localities within the framework of the SSE.

The emergence of SSE is based on the needs of people struggling with systemic failures. It refers to autonomous, independent, and collective forms of organizations in which ordinary people appropriate their lives around the needs and demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century crisis. As Utting (2015) argues, the results of the failure to establish a system in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the Great Depression and world wars, the growth-oriented development model resulted in crises. It is clear that SSE, made up of peoples' active agency, shares similar concerns with the post-development theory.

"Ordinary people" facing the severe effects of the development paradigm have created such alternatives. "Vulnerabilities" arising from these processes, in which everyone has been diversely affected, have brought serious damage to women. During this process, women have been the most vulnerable with greater loss in growth-oriented development programs. Feminist critique of the development following post-development paths, has brought new visions to reveal invisible inequality and power relations. Women were severely affected by the negative consequences of growth-oriented development, such as increase in unemployment, the devaluation of unpaid female labor, the double burden of women, and triggering environmental problems (Utting, 2015). This period increased the visibility of women's paid labor, however, it undermined women's unpaid labor and reproductive role (Escobar, 1995).

This unequal situation may motivate women to create viable and appropriate forms of organization to empower themselves. Thus, it is interesting to trace the struggles of women as active agents in seeking alternatives beyond the paradigms. Because gender inequality, which is embedded in *ideas, values, and identities*, is multidimensional and cannot be combated with the universal and single priorities, according to Kabeer (2005, p. 23). In this struggle, there are three basic dimensions for women's empowerment: agency, resources, and achievements (Kabeer, 2005) in addition to

income generation. In other words, women's agency, participation in policymaking processes, and multidimensional empowerment can be considered as major bases for women's empowerment and can reduce gender equality.

In this study, I intend to focus on women's cooperatives, which have been an increasing movement since the 2000s in Turkey, so as to deal with the negative effects of women from the development processes. This increasing trend caught my attention to study their history, legal status, and differences in women's cooperatives from other economic enterprises in the SSE framework. I noticed that there are very few studies on women's cooperatives in the literature and decided to conduct this research aiming to fill the gap and provide some suggestions for further research.

The aim of this thesis is to research on the transformative potentials and limits of the women's co-operatives from the SSE framework. My research initial question is *“How and to what extent women's co-operatives have the potential to create a new path towards women's empowerment and gender equality within the framework of the SSE?”*. I will focus on women's empowerment and gender equality, creating an alternative organization of work, and transformative agendas from local through women's co-operatives. I, therefore, designed the field research around the themes on (i) the purpose of the establishment, (ii) women's decision to the membership, (iii) institutional structure and management processes, (iv) the role of the co-operative in transforming women's lives, (v) co-operative-related feedback from the local, (vi) relations with the external environment, (vii) engagement in the local issues, and (viii) problems and issues facing women's co-operatives.

## **1.1 Methodology of The Study**

Methodologically, I believe it would be the most appropriate method to address women's social and economic empowerment from a feminist perspective by focusing on their experiences based on gender. While focusing on a female-only space, conducting field research with in-depth quantitative methodology would be the best choice for listening to their own experiences in women's co-operatives.

In this study, as a feminist researcher, I use feminist methodology as a cornerstone of the research to allow women to share their stories in their own words and voices. Focusing on gender, not women, is an important point in this thesis. That is, the focus has been on women's experience in a society where women set the limits of what they can do, and how much they can or cannot do. Besides, the labor market narrows the social boundaries for women even more with criteria such as age, education, experience, physical well-being, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, race, and ethnicity. In that point, women's co-operatives' potentials and limits as a same-sex alternative model of organization in social transformation will be discussed.

During the research, women were not considered as sex, but gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Women's knowledge was at the center of the research, dualities from the traditional methodological approaches like knower-known, subject-object rejected through providing as possible as non-hierarchical ground based on the feminist methodology. To sum up, as a researcher instead of locating myself somewhere in this thesis, I made an effort to stand in a position as objective as possible throughout the study. Evaluation through the theoretical and practical research and discovering the meaning of women's speeches were the most exciting aspect of this thesis.

Finally, in this study, it is aimed that theory and practice interact with and support each other, rather than directing the possibilities and limits of the theoretical framework. While this study fills a gap in the literature, it also aims to bring new questions for further research. Finally, it aims to strategically provide a guideline for women's co-operatives, their alliance, and policymakers.

After the research questions and theoretical framework were considered, selecting a qualitative research approach was the most appreciated design for data collection. Considering the theoretical framework, the quantitative method would not be appreciated to measure the transformative potential of women's co-operatives, if any. In the literature, it is also recommended to conduct qualitative studies research to cope with the methodological problems in research on women's entrepreneurship

(Stevenson, 1990; Neergaard & Ulhøi, 2007; Henry et al., 2016; Yadav & Unni, 2016). Following this, conducting qualitative research is the most appreciated one to study on women's co-operatives as a female-only initiatives.

## **1.2 Research Process**

According to the latest data stated by the Directorate General of Tradesmen, Craftsmen and Cooperatives under the Ministry of Trade, the number of women's cooperatives and women entrepreneurial cooperatives has rapidly increased and reached around 350 across the country. In this study, the province of Izmir, which has the highest number of women's cooperatives among 81 provinces in Turkey, was chosen as a geographical boundary due to its high number. Thus, women's cooperatives in Izmir were selected as a sample group within the scope of this thesis.

In the selection process, 23 cooperatives with the "women's cooperatives" phrase in their official name among the almost 30 ones, but an undetermined certain number due to the gradual increase in number to set up, were contacted in the first step. Due to the density of their work, any appointment could not be made despite several time contacts with the 2 cooperatives. Another cooperative was not included in interviews after their statement that they do not actively work since the establishment. Lastly, it was not possible to interview one cooperative as they stated that it would not be useful for this study while they were in the process of dissolution.

Throughout the process of research design, I have formed the qualitative research questions and decided on collected data through semi-structured and in-depth interviews. When the questions were ready, ethical permission from the Middle East Technical University Human Subjects Ethics Committee was taken so as to collect data. Yet, in the conditions of the pandemic, the beginning of the data collection process took longer than expected, making appointments, and completing all interviews took almost one and half months between the 22<sup>nd</sup> August and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

Before starting the interviews, all were planned to be held in cooperative buildings or other common venues. However, 14 out of 19 interviews were conducted online due to COVID-19. Cooperatives far from the central points of Izmir Province could not be visited due to health concerns upon my decision. Some of the cooperative representatives close to the central points in the city also preferred online interviews due to health concerns.

During the interviews, 17 out of the 19 were recorded and then analyzed by the transcriptions of recorded voices. Two interviews that could not be recorded due to permission and technical problem were carefully noted during the interviews and written up within the same day after the interviews. Making appointments and completing all interviews took almost one and a half months. 18 out of the 19 interviews were conducted with one representative of each cooperative. In a joint interview, three other cooperative members who were present at the venue during the interview were also spontaneously involved in the interview process at the request of the planned interviewee. In total, 23 members from 19 cooperatives were involved in the data collection process. However, I don't have detailed information about two interviewees as 2 of 23 the respondents for the fact that they attended the interviews with very short conversations while they were busy with cooperative tasks in the cooperative building. The interviews lasted at least 40 and at most 142 minutes.

While conducting research, first step was to introduce myself, explain the aim, scope, and methodology of this study, then to mention the importance of feminist methodology for me, and to conclude with the ethical issues. Later on, I requested them to tell how and why the cooperative was founded, how and why they are involved in this process, what is the importance of the cooperative for interviewee and other members, what the pros and cons of cooperatives are. I had the listed questions with me, yet I did not directly ask each question by following them. Generally, interviewees answered me beyond the questions I directed. However, when they did not, I asked more questions by natural flow of the conversation without interrupting them. The effort not to ask every question directly and not to make them feel questioned was

significant to tackle the knower-known and object-subject dilemmas during the interviews.

### **1.3 An Overview of Women's Co-operatives**

As a result of the field research, general information was obtained about the establishment dates of the co-operative women's co-operatives, the number of members, their economic and social activities, sales channels and the demographic information of the interviewees.

According to the establishment dates, the oldest cooperative was established in 2010. It is seen that the establishment of cooperatives has accelerated as of 2015 and the acceleration has also increased as of 2019. Regarding the recent history of women's cooperatives, which started as a movement in the early 2000s, it has been revealed that women's cooperatives have been increasingly established in Izmir in recent years.

Regarding members, the average number is 63 with at least 7 members and a maximum of 258 members. Although the number of members varies among co-operatives, there are 258, 172, 100, 94, and 80 members in the five co-operatives with the highest number of members. According to Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), the average number of employees in small-sized enterprises is 19,9; in medium-sized enterprises is 16,6; and in SMEs is 51,8 in Turkey (TUIK, 2020). Compared to the employment capacities of small and medium businesses, and SMEs, women's co-operatives have potential if they would employ all their members.

On a sectoral basis, women's co-operatives generally operate food and agricultural production, handicrafts production, textile, tourism management, cafe and restaurant management, and food and beverage services. In a detailed way, interviewees mentioned that they operate in food production, food processing, agricultural production, handicrafts, weaving, textiles, recycling products, restaurant-cafe management, and beach management. Based on the interviews, it is seen that the most common economic activity among women co-operatives is food production.



The sales channels are very diverse and differ among the cooperatives. On the one hand, some cooperatives have the capacity to export, on the other hand, some are capable to sell their products only in the producer's markets of the municipality. In general, sales channels are fairs, bazaars, sales points in the city center, producer markets, the People's Grocery (i.e. Halkın Bakkalı) market, the Grand Plaza business of the Metropolitan Municipality, local government enterprises, local and national grocery stores, NGOs, shopkeepers, other cooperatives, chain restaurants, and retailers. They also sell directly through the cooperative's websites and social media. In addition to the private sector, NGOs and direct sales, it is seen that the municipality has an important actor in the access to the market.

According to demographic information, the average age of the interviewees is 48, with minimum of 31 and maximum of 62 years old. Only 4 women were interviewed under the age of 40, and the participation of young women in cooperatives is limited. In terms of education, the high school level is found in common. The education levels of women vary from primary school to graduate level in cooperatives. Regarding the working life history of women before becoming a member of cooperatives, it is seen that mostly retired women are included in cooperatives. However, it was noted that there were also small agricultural producers, veterinarians, textile workers, self-employed, municipal staff, computer engineers, political party workers, and nonworking women who were outside the labor force during all their lives. These data demonstrate that women's cooperatives consist of various women's profiles in terms of age, education level, and working life history. In this respect, it can be alleged that women's cooperatives are inclusive structures in terms of membership and containing various women's profiles. Moreover, considering that most of the interviewees are members of the board and chairpeople of the board, it can be said that women from various age groups, education levels, and working life backgrounds can be elected as board members and chairpeople of the board.

In terms of the categorization of women's cooperatives, it is quite challenging to make rigid distinctions. Although Özdemir (2013) identifies three types of women's

cooperatives; (i) founded and directed by particular institutions; (ii) aiming social interests, (iii) locally operates, such types are not directly feasible categorizations according to the findings. During the interviews, tremendous diverse stories came to the forefront rather than the similar-shared aims encountered in the national and international literature. There is a variety of the approaches and practices. This situation made it possible to realize from the very beginning that there was not a single prototype in women's cooperative. However, I should address that during the field research, although I did not expect the rural-urban distinction, I found some patterns. These patterns are followed as; agriculture and business management in rural areas constitutes different sectors compared to urban areas; democratic management and governance are easier to practice in rural areas; autonomy and independency are much more challenging in the urban area; women's engagement in local issues and networks are easier in the urban area; and rural women's cooperatives contribute to the local development.

I suggest that there are three types of women's cooperatives regarding establishment purposes leading to the autonomy and independence issue. The first type is women's collective initiatives based on their agenda and local needs and demands, the second type is the women's initiative under the single women's leadership based on women's and local needs, and the third type is political projects led by political actors.

In the first type, cooperatives established under the leadership of local women aim at multi-dimensional and collective empowerment of women through creating local solutions based on their needs with their resources. This type serves women's collective action and solidarity, engagement in the local issues, cooperation with wider networks, and local development. These types of cooperatives are more compatible in the rural areas and those have much more impact on development. For instance, a newly established cooperative (Coop.11) highlights the establishment purposes that they aimed at carrying the geographical indication product grown in their regions, to make the region a well-deserved place, to prevent the merchant from holding the price monopoly, and to process the discarded products. Coop.16, which was founded with the idea of establishing even a factory to create employment in the region, stated that

they produce geographically marked textile products in the rural areas of Izmir, and also Japanese groups visited the village and organized workshops on this geographically marked silk textile in the cooperative. In addition to the development in the region, they also strive to close the economic and social gap between the village people without land and newcomers who are well educated, and well-skilled. Coop.19 put forward its efforts to support local people with the following statement: “Honestly, we did not want the village women to be incomplete”.

An autonomous and independent women's group empowers not just its members but also the local community. They promote the growth of traditional arts and the production of local agriculture. The activities carried out are influenced by the local conditions and resources. Women's cooperatives foster local development with the inclusion of women, youth, the elderly, and male producers.

The second type of cooperatives is established by the attempts under the leadership of a single woman, considering the needs of other women in the region, apart from her own needs. An interviewee (Coop.4) stated that she went to the course after she retired and realized that the products of women could not be sold, and she thought that the work of women could be valued. Another cooperative was established in order for women to sell their traditional home-based products, to become a member, to earn together, to produce together under the roof of the cooperative (Coop.15). A cooperative from the neighbourhood formed by internal migration in the poor areas of the province was established for the economic and social empowerment of women in a joint initiative against the exclusion of women from business life due to their childcare burden and traditional womanhood roles. In addition, they intended to find a solution to the informal work of women from traditional mussel production where women sell their labor far below market prices (Coop.17). This model mostly evokes women's associations in civil society, it is not based on a collective vision and purpose as of its foundation.

The last type of cooperatives is established purely for political purposes or under the guidance of a political party. During the election campaign, a cooperative was

established upon the mayoral candidate's proposal to women to establish a women's cooperative (Coop.7). Another cooperative was quickly established by the Mayor's leadership when they heard about the opposition party's attempts to establish cooperatives in the region (Coop.10). It is also determined that many cooperatives were established with the support of the local municipalities. "The previous mayor had set up cooperative as seeing his own friends and relatives as a political advertising tool" (Coop.12). Besides, by assigning women in charge of municipal units, women's cooperatives were established to find solutions to political demands, to find solutions to job demands that could not meet by employment in municipality units (Coop.8). Moreover, cooperatives were established in the rural area as a project of the municipality to support women in rural areas with the support of the municipality after various trainings by selecting "smart, docile, talented" women among the women who came to the places called neighborhood houses where the municipality provides free skill courses (Coop.14), and another started with *a political project* (Coop.18).

The field research showed that women's cooperatives in Izmir have been established by; (i) a group of women, (i) single woman-led, or (iii) political projects. The relationship with municipalities bears on dualities between the support and threats in Izmir. On the one hand, one of the cooperatives mentions that the mayor, who has an opposing political view, gives them support without advertising, on the other hand, another mayor prohibits women's cooperatives from using the tablecloths made in the previous mayor's time from the same political party.

When the establishment stories are evaluated, the leadership of the municipalities in the establishment of women's cooperatives is more than the cooperatives established by grassroots women. Since this trend is more popular in the cooperatives established in recent years, it can be foreseen that the number of "political project" cooperatives would be more increase in the upcoming period. Direct or indirect interventions in Izmir generally come from municipalities, but in other provinces, it has been said that institutions such as the District Governor's or Governor's office also intervened in the women's cooperatives.

Establishment processes may provide a clue for a picture of the rest of Turkey, or it may be specific to the Izmir City. In other regions, however, women's cooperatives may not only have autonomy but also be forced into this structure. Because, considering that women's cooperatives have a strong network amongst others, and they have been regularly meeting since 2014, other parts of Turkey may be more challenging. Besides, Izmir is a place with a long history of cooperatives, even here no one publicly objects to such interventions.

Although there are some differences between the cooperatives, I prefer to examine the women's cooperatives in Izmir as a whole, not as types. The threats mentioned above may increase over time, and many women's cooperatives may close. However, the evaluation of women's cooperatives within the framework of the SSE throughout this study does not explore the potential of cooperatives outside this framework. For this reason, without overlooking these threats but considering their political instrumentalization, women's solidarity-based on collective initiatives will be researched.

I believe that various models, experiences, and challenges play important roles in understanding the variety of models, pluralism. While this general information provides a brief background on the cooperative structure, the potential of the women's cooperatives to create a new path towards women's empowerment and gender equality within the framework of the SSE will be deeply discussed in the following sub-topics through women's empowerment and gender equality, democratization of work, and new paths.

#### **1.4 Limitations of the Research**

In this study, the geographical boundary may be one restriction to understand general trends in the case study across the country. Yet, in this thesis, it is believed that socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental conditions will bring different patterns in every region. Thus, this thesis does not intend to evaluate women's cooperatives with a micro-scale study to explain the nationwide pattern.

In terms of the diversity of the interviewees, except for 2 of the 19, the interviews were conducted with women from the board of directors, mostly heads of the cooperative. Interviewing more than one person from each cooperative at separate times and venues could provide more information about the participation and managerial process of different members. I suppose that a limited variety of interviews for each cooperative is one of the most important limitations of this thesis.

Considering the limitations and possibilities of both online and face-to-face meetings had pros and cons. On the one hand, interviews were completed without any interruptions, for instance, other people from the cooperative interfered during the interviews. In the online platforms, without time constraints for the availability, women were easily enabled to make appointments. I have feelings and thoughts that they responded sincerely and openly to questions during online interviews. Because, even when they were undecided about some issues, they explained the reasons behind their thoughts or feelings. It was easy to conduct online interviews with people who have access to digital tools and the ability to use online meeting applications. On the other hand, being unable to be in the cooperative buildings or common venues where they interact with the members was a major obstacle. It was not possible to observe the other members of cooperatives, their relations with each other, their production processes even for a few hours. However, face-to-face interviews, which could not be widely conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed me to have the opportunity to observe the cooperative's environment and other partners' reactions to the responses provided. If I had the chance, I would prefer to conduct all interviews in cooperatives to have an opportunity to observe at a time when cooperative partners are interacting with each other, or in the production process.

During the research process, having interaction with the interviewed cooperative members through face-to-face or online meetings once or more than that may have also created a constraint due to the being professional worker at Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW). In order to overcome this limitation, the purpose, method and ethical issues of this thesis are explained in detail. After it was thought

that everyone had no doubts especially about the privacy, the interview has been started. Despite this limitation, knowing the cooperative model has further strengthened this study.

Overall, it was observed that a friendly atmosphere was created during the interviews and the women in the study group expressed themselves comfortably without time limitation. Almost all the interviewees without being asked stated that if more information will be needed, they can attend to another interview again. Moreover, all the interviewees expressed their satisfaction on the study of women's cooperatives as a subject.

### **1.5 Assumptions and Arguments of the Study**

After I had decided to research women's cooperatives, I made three grounded assumptions guiding me to design the field research questions. The first one is that women's cooperatives may have the potential to employ unemployed, underemployed, and marginalized women in a democratic workplace with participatory structures and more just relations in production and redistribution. The second one is that women's cooperatives may have the capacity to support and strengthen their local community towards more resilient societies. The third one is that women's cooperatives, which are generally established with low capital and include the lower and middle income group, may lose their autonomy to access external aid and support.

As a result of the field research carried out considering these assumptions, detailed information on pre-research notions and more were obtained. In addition to the field research, legislations, official reports, and national action plans on women's cooperatives were analyzed. Under the light of these, this study suggests some arguments.

In this part, I intend to summarize the proposed arguments in this research focusing on the experience of women's cooperatives in Izmir. Firstly, women's cooperatives are not only economic entities but they also allow women's multidimensional

empowerment based on solidarity. Secondly, women's cooperatives develop democratic and participatory models. Thirdly, women's cooperatives have the potential to network, influence public policy, and bring a new vision from the local, and may inspire other agents of the SSE to the international level.

## **1.6 Contributions and Limitations of the Study**

This research contributes to the literature for studying women's cooperatives from the feminist post-developmental approach, as we assume this research question will be studied for the first time in Turkey. Besides, I focus on women's cooperatives in the SSE framework, because I suppose that women's cooperatives have distinct features from the traditional cooperative structures. The originality of the research question and the scope will possibly fill the gap in the literature. Moreover, I believe that taking positions as a feminist researcher in the field research, literature review, and analysis have enabled me to understand the issues better and analyze the data and arguments throughout the study more efficiently.

The existing limited women's cooperatives literature in Turkish case target its focus on the empowerment of women, research with limited questions for wide patterns, or explore the topic with small cases to explain the nation-wide trends (Gümüőođlu, 2012; Özdemir, 2013; Vural 2013; Dugid et al., 2015; Barut, 2017; Dalkıran, 2017; Özer-Topalođlu & Topalođlu, 2017; Günay & Demirci-Aksoy, 2018; Kızıldađ & Karataő, 2018; Cinar et al., 2019; Kızıldađ, 2019; Demircan-Yıldırım, 2020; Kurőuncu & Yılmaz, 2020; Kurtege-Sefer, 2020; Yaman, 2020). Therefore, this study will contribute to understand the case in a broad sense and give ground for comparison with other cases in Turkey, or abroad.

This study seeks to analyze the following issues on women's cooperatives in details based on the field research and being expected to be a significant resource for further research on women's cooperatives in Turkey. Moreover, this study focuses on women's cooperatives within the SSE framework from the feminist post-development



perspective and seeks possibilities for opening an alternative space for employment through the SSEs.

Since this study is a master level thesis, it was necessary to narrow its scope and set a geographical boundary for the field research. Time limitation was another constrain to study the topic more comprehensively with more interviews from the same cooperatives. Moreover, If I had time, I would like to comparatively conduct the field research with women both in mixed-structure cooperatives and female-only cooperatives. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic social distancing conditions prevented the research from being conducted on the scheduled time and in the planned research environment.

## **1.7 Structure of the Study**

This study consists of five chapters. The introduction, the first chapter provides a brief on the theoretical and conceptual background, methodology, research process, an overview of the field research, limitations, main assumptions and arguments, contributions and limitations, and the structure of the thesis.

In the *second chapter*, the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study is presented. The emergence of the development approach after WWII and its criticisms have been briefly summarized. It is stressed how and to what extent the feminist post-development approach provides a ground to discuss the potential and limits of women's cooperatives. Then, I address the origin of cooperatives and their historical developments and a literature review on women's cooperatives across the world. After providing a logical basis, I explain the historical development of cooperatives from the 15th century to the Turkish Republican era. Lastly, I focus on the historical development of women's cooperatives in Turkey and discuss a literature review on the topic.

In the *third chapter*, I have addressed the social economy and solidarity economy, to which we can refer as the predecessor of the SSE concept within a historical and

contextual framework. Then, I discuss the SSE framework in this study to facilitate and become more meaningful to discuss women's cooperatives in this framework.

In the *fourth chapter*, I discuss and analyze the collected data from the field research. This chapter consists of 3 core topics. In the first topic, I discuss women's empowerment and gender equality through economic, social, psychological and political empowerment. In the second one, I argue for the democratization of work through women's cooperatives. In the third one, I focus on the women's cooperatives' transformative agenda from the local. As for the last one, I demonstrate the key issues and problems faced by women's cooperatives.

The *last chapter* provides an overview of the study by analyzing theoretical discussions and field research. While answering the main research question and following sub-questions, it also provides suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Development

After WWII, development as a discourse at the political level in the presidential speech of the US President Harry S Truman stated as:

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas ... make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development. (Truman, 1949)

After the Truman's speech, the concept of development both moved to the political level and gave the USA a political mission to spread the development project across the world. The development project has been portraying some countries as the savior, while the rest of the world has been portrayed as depending on development projects (Escobar, 2007, pp.19-20). Moreover, Truman has presented underdevelopment as a dilemma to be overcome by developed countries. He stated that the underdeveloped nations had a desire and would develop just like them, and they would support for the capital investment incentive necessary. Based on Truman's discourse, development refers to a strategy that is shaped in the middle of a certain geopolitical context, which is longed for and needs to be encouraged, by pointing to the USA and other capitalist developed countries.

The economic representations of development have been studied by economists as implementation strategies. North American economist Walter Whitman Rostow's

book "*The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*" published in 1960 is one of the most important representative of growth as an economic development. Rostow (1960) defines growth as a series of stages that all societies must go through, and the growth stages model he elaborates has become the basic plan of development and modernization. In Rostow's theory, which is considered a key development model and political theory, society is analyzed in five stages starting from traditional society to consumer society. From the first stage to the last stage, *traditional society*, *preconditions to takeoff*, *takeoff*, *drive to maturity*, and finally *the age of high mass consumption*, are expressed as the ultimate goal for development. He suggests that agricultural societies in the first stage are poor societies, and the aim is to reach the final stage described as the widespread consumption economy (Rostow, 1960). Rostow's theory had an important role in promoting economic models.

Since Truman's speech in 1949 on the desire for growth after the political and economic foundations of development, the development strategy has not been successful despite the all theoretical and political efforts. Development models are reflected in practice as "structural inequalities created by capitalist modes of production" (Aykaç, 2018, p.19) and remained insurmountable problems. Development has led to a world where inequalities deepen with the claim of universality and the main problems related to development are as follows: The first one is that development has been considered as an inevitable necessity. The second one is that the most important indicator of development has been considered as economic growth but growth, social development, and welfare cannot be achieved without a fair redistribution system. The third one is that the requirement for industrialization in order to achieve development goals. It has been said that nations cannot progress without industrialization. As the final one, development has been considered at the macro scale overlooking local communities and conditions (Aykaç, 2018, pp. 20-21). Such promises that development will be fulfilled through economic growth, universal and unique values, and industrialization, as well as the assumptions that it is a desired and inevitable route for undeveloped societies, have not been realized. Academic research has sought a new alternative to development, while also questioning its consequences on the most marginalized communities.

### **2.1.1 Post-Development Approach**

The book *"The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power"*, which was edited by Wolfgang Sachs published in 1992, is seen as one of the pioneers of the post-development approach, foreword with "The last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary" (Sachs, 2007, p. 1). The great claim of the time that development has come to an end has also raised academic and intellectual questions about which alternative approach to development or alternative development approaches should be adopted.

Arturo Escobar, one of the pioneers of this tradition, sought to answer to alternative development approach and alternative development approach in the post-development literature. The post-development approach rejects all paradigms of development. While rejecting alternative development, this approach considers post-development as an alternative to development. While these alternatives foresee a complete break from the development paradigm, they explain indigenous cultures and indigenous knowledge as an alternative based on criticism against the dominant scientific paradigm and advocating for pluralist grassroots movements from the local (Escobar, 1995, p. 215).

The basis of knowledge and criticism about development is based on Michel Foucault in various writings. Following Foucault, Aram Ziai has studied development criticism in his early research, and he references Foucault's conceptualizations of development archaeology, knowledge as power, autonomous production of truth, and the upheaval of secondary knowledge. Such points to the intellectual basis of post-development literature in which developed as a discourse is criticized, many post-development theories clarified development as a discourse (Ziai, 2004, pp. 1046-1047).

Ziai (2004) remarks on the fact that the post-development approach sparked debates and categorized it into four topics. First, he points out the culture of the post-development approach and the romanticization of local communities. He urges that some traditional approaches should not be accepted without being critical and sceptical. Second, in post-development approaches, some advocate a total rejection of

development and modernity, while others think that positive aspects of development should not be rejected. Third, some post-development approaches treat cultures as immutable, while others consider culture as fluid. Finally, the planned strategies such as returning to agriculture are supported (Ziai, 2004, p. 1053).

According to these approaches, Ziai argues that there are two distinct post-development approaches. The first one, which he calls as “neo-populist post-development approach”, is an approach that advocates a complete rejection of modernity and development, the romanticization of local communities, the romanticization of traditions, the point of view towards cultural relativism by romanticizing the fixity of cultures, rejecting modernity, and returning to subsistence agriculture. In "*sceptical post-development approach*", he states that traditions and cultures should be approached sceptically on some issues, that cultures are changeable and that the planning view should be abandoned for social transformation without rejecting some of the useful elements of modernity.

According to Ziai (2004), planned movements mentioned by the neo-populist development approach should be critically evaluated because they may reject modernity and become the project of traditional elites with anti-modern patriarchal values. For instance, while the Islamic revolution in Iran broke out as a result of rejecting modernity and Western-centric view, it caused the suppression of the women's movement regarding cultural and traditional codes. In the second approach, he evaluates the scepticism approach within radical democracy. While the neo-populist approach can be accused by romanticism, it draws attention to the point that the liberating potential of radical democracy should not be overlooked at this point (Ziai, 2004, pp. 1053-1058).

The radical and pluralist democracy project, in which Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2015) draw attention to other relations of oppression and exploitation that Marxism ignores without breaking away from the Marxist approach, is pivotal in the articulation of radical democracy with the post-development approach. In the post-

development approach, there is an imagination of democracy in which the power is localized, and the power is used by the people (Ziai, 2007, pp. 122-124).

### **2.1.2 Towards Feminist Post-Development Approach**

The issue on women and development has been the subject of research after the notion of development had delivered the world into the developed-under-developed, First World-Third World, and South-North dilemmas. The relationship between women and development has been discussed in various frameworks. In general, women's issue in development has been mainstreamed through *Women in Development (WID)*, *Women and Development (WAD)*, and *Gender and Development (GAD)* approaches within the framework of development discussions. After the critique of development itself by post-development theory, a feminist post-development approach has emerged as a new battle.

By the 1970s, after 20 years of development idea, feminists had begun to problematize and criticize women's situation in development. The first critique came from the WID approach mostly by liberal feminists, and it was urged that women excluded and not properly benefitted from the development programs. The WID approach put forward the suggestion that the problem could be solved by integrating women in these programs. By the WID approach, the visibility of women in development increased, nevertheless, lacking government plans, coordination, implementation, and monitoring bodies had led to unfulfillments of the promoting women in development. In this process, UN and the other international development agencies supported the integration of women into the development issue. After the inadequacy of these efforts became evident, such agencies collaborated with governments, ministries, and implementation units to carry out the process and include women in development process. Nevertheless, such approach could not deal with the women's exclusion from social structure and economic system in a holistic way (Muyoyeta, 2004, pp. 5-6).

In 1970s, as a result of WID critiques, WAD had been put forward, particularly by Marxist feminists by emphasizing the strong class issue. WAD approach had focused on the interaction between women and the development process because it was

assumed that women had always been economic actors both in paid and unpaid work. Women's roles in patriarchal societies had always served to class inequality in the global level. WAD evaluated women's position in a wide range of global inequality and this approach was accused of undermining class inequality (Muyoyeta, 2004, pp. 6-7).

In the 1980s, the GAD approach emerged as a reflection of various feminist perspectives as a result of the limitations of WID and WAD approaches and lessons from the experiences on development. GAD focused not only on the role of women in development but also how and to what extent women and men benefitted from this process. Besides, WAD focused on social relations to reveal the difference between women and men to access and control over resources and power relations. Focusing on the gender division of labor in social relations helped to understand women's triple role along with the visibility of reproductive roles of women as well as reproductive roles. In addition, such focus found out different reflections of gender division of labor across cultures (Muyoyeta, 2004, pp. 7-8).

In an environment where women and development were discussed with WID, WAD and GAD approaches, women and development issue has been integrated into a multidimensional discussion by integrating feminist ideas into the post-development approach. According to Kabeer (2003), understanding the gender inequality embedded in social relations in all societies is essential to uncover other power relations. Moreover, the intersectionality of all forms of socio-economic pressures requires us to conduct gender analysis to achieve sustainable development goals (Kabeer, 2003, pp. 1-3).

From the first approaches suggesting the inclusion of women in development processes, the significant aspect of women's roles in development has also arisen. Kabeer (2003) argues that "women's ability to participate in the various processes of decision-making, private as well as public, which impinge on their lives and wellbeing, are critical forms of agency" (p. 12). For this reason, the empowerment of women in



co-operatives is a crucial form of organization both for their economic empowerment and for increasing their capacity to influence decisions that affect their lives.

In the development process, income-generating economic activities of women became visible, however, it is argued that reproductive roles of women have been undermined in this process. This has resulted in the mainstream development approach limiting women to gain opportunities from development through patriarchal structures. As Arturo Escobar (1995), one of the representatives of the post-development approach, emphasized, while the reproductive roles of women were visible, they turned into invisible farmers, “that development finds support in existing patriarchal structures (both developed and developing countries) to organize a particular visibility economy” (pp. 172-173).

On the one hand the visibility of women's economic roles in development processes is ensured, on the other hand overlooking social relations causes women to suffer from development processes in the patriarchal structures. In this context, feminist post-development approach will provide a theoretical basis for discussing the potential of the model of women's co-operatives where women are organized based on their own needs and priorities, concerned with local conditions, and building on local knowledge. In order to analyse whether women's co-operatives in Turkey have provided alternative models for women from the post-development approach, international women's co-operatives and development literature will be discussed first. Then, the emergence of women's co-operatives in the Turkish context, their legal status, and current studies in the existing literature will be presented.

## **2.2 Co-operatives**

This part aims to present a brief history about co-operatives, a conceptual definition, and overview of existing co-operatives in the world. Lastly, I will be discussed critically co-operatives whether those are a long-term model to the other businesses, or it is a self-protection strategy of the people that emerged in times of crisis.

### 2.2.1 The Origin of Co-operatives

Since ancient times, people have been cooperating to meet their various economic and social needs through collective work. The records of co-operatives, which are an economic and social organization as we use it today, has emerged during eighteenth century in Europe, relatively recent history.

The first recorded examples of co-operatives in the world were the fire insurance co-operative in England in the 1700s, the attempts of the cheese makers who were the first of the consumer co-operatives in France in the 1750s, and the bank or credit initiatives in Germany in the parallel period. Similarly, mutual insurance company was found by Benjamin Franklin in the U.S. in 1750s. By 1830, 300 co-operative societies were registered in the UK and the first Co-operative Congress was held in 1831. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, social and political activists had attempted to establish co-operative societies in France, the United Kingdom, and Germany (Williams, 2007, p. 10).

Nearly 100 years after initial attempts across the Europe, the first modern co-operative society of the Co-operative Movement was recorded in 1844 and during the Industrial Revolution co-operatives have spread across the Europe in order to cope with severe effects of Industrialization. In Rochdale town, England, *Pioneers of Rochdale Society* that established in 1844 by 28 weavers and craftsmen have been recognized as a first co-operatives. Their main aim was to cooperation through opening their own store to sell foods, otherwise they could not have been able to do open this store by individual efforts. In 1850 and 1855 years, they established flourmill, a shoe factory, and a textile plant. Their main purpose was to produce for use, against the idea of production for exchange. This initiative of the Rochdale Society encouraged many workers in Europe as well, and co-operatives founded by grassroots' rapidly spread throughout Europe (Forno, 2013, p. 278).

*The Rochdale Society* was not only the first known co-operative effort, but they also provided an intellectual basis for the movement. Today's core 7 principles of co-

operatives are an updated and revised version of the Rochdale Society's principles (Birchall, 1997).

### **2.2.2 Definition, Principles, and Values**

A co-operative is simply defined as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”. The basic values of co-operatives are “self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity”. There are 7 core principles that turn core values into practice: (i) voluntary and open membership, (ii) democratic member control, (iii) member economic participation, (iv) autonomy and independence, (v) education, training, and information, (vi) cooperation among co-operatives, (vii) concern for community (ICA, 2016).

### **2.2.3 A Global Overview**

Globally, 2.94 million co-operatives have 1.217.5 million members. Co-operative activities concern 252.2 million people, mostly in the agricultural sector. 279.4 million people are employed in or within the scope of co-operatives, around 10% of the working population (Eum, 2017, p. 12). Geographically, co-operatives are located mostly in Asia (2,156,219), Africa (375,375), Europe (221,960), America (181,378), and Oceania (2,391), respectively (Eum, 2017, p. 25).

Typologically, there are 4 meta-types of co-operatives; (a) users' co-operative, (b) producer co-operative, (c) worker co-operative, (d) multi-stakeholder co-operative. Users' co-operatives provide services to user members rather than jobs and employment. Consumer co-operatives, financial co-operatives, service co-operatives, and housing co-operatives are in this category. Producer co-operatives provide employment opportunity to produce goods and/or services for its members and employees. Worker co-operatives basically create jobs for its members. Multi-stakeholder co-operatives serve different types of members through different types of

work. In addition to those meta-types of co-operatives, there are secondary co-operatives and enterprise co-operatives. The secondary co-operatives support the business of the initially mentioned 4 main type of co-operatives and enterprise co-operatives' members are legal persons (Eum, 2017, pp. 31-32).

There are 3 different forms of work and employment in co-operatives, namely employees, worker members, and self-employed producer members (Eum, 2017, p. 13). These types enable us to explain the different types of relations between people and co-operative organizations. Basically, "*employees*" are involved in the co-operative organization with the employee-employer relationship, as in other businesses. "*Worker members*" refer to worker ownership that promotes their autonomy and economic prosperity as distinct features from business models that basis on employee-employer relations. "Self-employed producer-members" refers to individual producers who produce products or provide services for co-operatives (Eum, 2017, p. 13). According to this conceptualization, official co-operative members, in other words, co-operative owners can work in co-operatives. Non-member people who are a part of co-operatives through the employee-employer relationship also work and employ. Lastly, individual producers can sell products or provide services for co-operatives, but they are not statistically counted as a worker or employees. Because such people do have not direct work and employment linkage with co-operatives, they may also work for other enterprises.

According to sectoral comparisons, co-operatives have been operated in various sectors. In agriculture and food industries, co-operatives operate the entire part of agricultural sector from cultivating to processing and marketing of agricultural goods. *Agricultural and food co-operatives* have present remarkable percent of the co-operatives worldwide and contribute to food security and poverty while supporting income generations and empowerment for smallholder producers. *Industry and utilities co-operatives* include industrial co-operatives, excepting of the food industry, and co-operatives that carry out economic public activities. Co-operatives in that category are concerned with ethical-cultural issues and innovation and many committed to green, sustainable, and responsible models. *Wholesale and retail trade*

*co-operatives* are comprised of purchasing and consumer co-operatives. Such co-operatives put promoting sustainable development, environmental concerns, and responsible consume ahead from maximize profit. *Insurance* co-operatives aim to ensure social protection system for their consumers. *Financial service co-operatives* consist of banks and credit unions, and these co-operative models are promising for the financial sector as they were more stable during the financial crisis. *Education, health, and social work co-operatives* serve for consumer, producer, and multi stakeholders, and aim to provide budget-friendly, high quality community care and social services. On the public interest side, this type of co-operatives has become more crucial after the withdrawal from the welfare state system. *The others*, include co-operatives providing services except the education, health, social work, such as housing, co-operative business services, communications, and transportation, besides those have potential for the development of service-oriented co-operatives (ICA & EURICSE, 2020, pp. 19-32). Co-operatives have been seen that co-operatives are dynamic organizations, they keep up with the times and its necessities. In a wide range activities, co-operatives struggle for food security, sustainable development, effective concerns, green economy, local concerns, innovation, local community interest in various sectors apart from economic concerns.

### **2.3 Literature on Women and Co-operatives**

Co-operatives have been placing at the center of efforts to achieve gender equality for international organizations such as International Labor Organization (ILO), International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), and United Nations (UN). In 1995, the ICA Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality was developed, and the UN Beijing Declaration was accepted in the same year. ICA has published many recommendations for gender equality in co-operatives and reports on women in co-operatives at the global level. UN Joint Program on gender equality and women empowerment also supports for women's participation in co-operatives and empowers their leadership role. In addition, institutions working for social economy and solidarity economies, such as Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS), also carry out research and programs for gender equality in co-operatives

as an important SSE actor. In the literature, apart from some extensive research, a few such studies generally conducted by ICA and ILO, are isolated and case specific studies. On the one hand these trends reveal the existence of varifocal and regional specific concerns researches, on the other hand, it also reveals common points in different contexts.

The number of women in co-operatives and women' leadership in co-operatives has been increased in many regions. Women in co-operatives in the world, make up 60% of the co-operatives in South Africa, and 95% of the consumer co-operatives in Japan. Women's participation in agricultural co-operatives in Uganda increased by 132%. The representation rate of women in leadership positions is 40% in worker co-operatives in Spain, 65% in financial co-operatives in Tanzania, and 41% in co-operative retail business in the United Kingdom (ICA, n.d.). Among sectors, women more occupy leadership position in finance and insurance co-operatives. In addition, women are the majority as founding members of housing, consumer, and artisanal co-operatives (ICA & ILO, 2015, p. 11).

The literature on women's co-operatives generally represents Latin America, Africa, Asia. There are also studies focusing on Turkey, Spain, and Greece cases. In Latin America, a study, which focused on a fair-trade coffee producer co-operative in Nicaragua, shows the key role of fair trade in mix-co-operative in empowering women. All the producer women interviewed drew attention to the increase in their incomes after the co-operative (Dilley, 2011). However, another research on Fair Trade certified co-operatives in Nicaragua shows that small-scale coffee producer women have still limited leadership in terms of obstacles shared by a limited number of people and the subordination of gender work to commercial interests. Although gender equality is an integrative idea of the fair-trade system, gender inequality still persists on the co-operatives (Ganem-Cuenca, 2011).

Another study from Southern Mexico focused on co-operatives established by women from diverse socio-economic background as a response to forced internal displacement. Women have created a new space for their selves and gain social and economic opportunities to survive. In addition, women have become community

leaders, collaborating with other women and indigenous community, participate in political struggle, advocating for their rights (Dawn 2212729 et al., 2016). A research in Hidalgo, Mexico that focuses on peasant and indigenous rural women-led co-operatives shows the importance of co-operative organization to possess autonomy, infrastructure and access to natural resources where women's access, use, and control over the resources restricted in the region. Co-operatives have not only allowed to reduce poverty but also provide a collective action under the leadership of women to ethical ecological change. Moreover, the study also reveals that cooperation with the community, municipal authorities, male households, and NGOs plays an important facilitating role to reach the potential (Ferro-Medina, 2019).

A significant gap remains in Africa in women's access to social, economic, and political resources. In agriculture, co-operatives provide both economic income, and social and political participation for women in both mixed co-operatives and female-only co-operatives. While women earn income, participation to community and decision-making processes, and their representation and voice increases. In general, co-operatives serve to poverty reduction. In African experience of cooperativism, women also access to savings and loan services through financial co-operatives in order to develop their business or achieve educational, health or social development services. Co-operatives have had some obstacles as well as their success in tackling a wide range of poverty reduction in Africa. The target of women's active and equal participation with their male colleagues in co-operatives has not yet been achieved. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to challenge the basic structural and socio-cultural structure. While targeting decrease gender-gap on the division of labor, women should support to access to resources, education, and training (COOP AFRICA, 2007, p. 1-4).

In Uganda, it is seen that as farmer women earn income in co-operatives, their social status improves, and women are more respected both in the household and in the community. In addition, women who cannot become members of the co-operative due to the pressure of their husbands, they also benefit from the activities of the co-operative. As women's leadership in the co-operative becomes stronger, it also allows

for the emergence of smaller, smaller-scale self-help projects that support the community (Ferguson & Kepe, 2011).

Another study on the potential of women's co-operatives for conflict settings was conducted in the Arab States; Lebanon, Iraq, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip. On the one hand co-operatives in the region promote the globalization process and market economy, on the other hand, the state, donors, and NGOization trends are on the stage (Esim & Omeria, 2010).

For the survival of the household in the region, women's breadwinner role is critical. In Lebanon, Iraq, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip, women-headed households in rural areas are a growing trend due to conflict in the region. It has been observed that men are more mobile as a result of their more conflict-related activities and working in risky areas, while women play the role of both activists and breadwinners to earn their living in the rural areas. The obstacles to private entrepreneurship and employment in the private sector for women along with lacking of women's ownership of resources and property due to the traditional gender roles, earning income opportunities for women are limited (Esim & Omeria, 2010, pp. 1-2).

In rural areas, establishing co-operatives in order to "*share risks, pool resources, accumulate savings, and provide credit*" is a trend since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this tradition, in the context of globalization and donor involvement, has revealed the tendency of co-operatives in the form of promoting entrepreneurship and market economy in recent years (Esim & Omeria, 2010, pp. 2-3).

Although there are some positive evaluations of the existence of women's co-operatives for developing women's own agency, increasing their voice, and economic empowerment in the literature, some basic problems also pointed out (Esim & Omeria, 2010, p. 4). In Palestine, women's initiatives were marginalized in the post-Oslo period and turned into a women's NGO movement. In post-war Lebanon, political parties and donor initiatives became more involved in co-operative activities. During the Baath



period in Iraq, the ruling party took control of the co-operatives, and after 2003, donor initiatives were included in the process as new dominant actors. Co-operatives remain marginal in the region, with their very small amount of job creation, around 1% percent, and limits on women's participation (Esim & Omeria, 2010, p. 3).

Co-operatives are insufficient in terms of gender responsiveness. mixed co-operatives generally operate under the leadership of men. The traditional roles of women are promoted in female-only co-operatives. It is argued that women should be empowered within mixed co-operatives through training for skill development, non-traditional occupations, and gender equality in a broad sense (Esim & Omeria, 2010, p. 5).

In the Asia Pacific Region, a significant gender gap has been determined for female leadership. The co-operative experience of women in small-scale agricultural producers and informal sectors plays an important role in women's empowerment. It is observed that the bargaining power of women in the only-women co-operatives has increased. Whereas women's income generation level increases, women's access to resources, technology, and infrastructure has been supported in co-operative organizations. However, women's access to knowledge and skills development is still insufficient. Regarding participation in the policy-making and decision-making processes, women's presence is increasing, but there is still a gender gap. To promote gender equality in mixed co-operatives, some had actions and develop strategies. Despite the limitations, women provide advantages to access opportunities in co-operatives (Azad, 2017).

In countries like Korea, Malaysia, India, and Iran, the leadership of women through female-only co-operatives is widespread. The tendency to establish women's co-operatives is due to the fact that it is easy for women to take part in female-only structures due to religious norms restricting women, to avoid male dominance in mixed organizations, and to promote feminist action (Kurimoto, n.d.).

The establishment of women's co-operatives in Greece has been supported and fostered by projects of the European Union (EU) and the government. Women's

participation in mixed co-operatives was relatively limited in Greece before women's co-operatives (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 2). State Institutions encouraged the establishment of women's co-operatives from the 1980s to the 2000s aimed to find a solution to the female unemployment and the immigration of young women from the countryside, to change the status of farmer women by encouraging women's collective actions (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 3).

Legally, some of the co-operatives reached out in this research are governed by Law on Agricultural Co-operatives, others were governed by the legal regimes of Urban Co-operatives. This situation is similar to the distinction between women in agricultural development co-operatives and women's initiative co-operatives in Turkey in terms of women's co-operatives in the country. Among sectors, women's co-operatives operate in traditional food products, handicraft products, and agritourism (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 4).

Empirical research conducted in Greece showed that farmer women preferred to work collectively in extra-agricultural activities because such collective work made them feel stronger (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 2). Co-operatives with active and leading skilled women, bottom-up organizations, and cooperation between supportive local agents have been successful (Koutsou et al., 2003, pp. 4-5). Women's co-operatives provide a great opportunity to produce preserves, jams, aromatic herbs, and pasta which are traditionally known how to make by women, and they have turned their knowledge into a paid job. In agro-industrial co-operatives, women produced handicrafts and engaged in agritourism activities (Koutsou et al., 2003).

The key problems of women's co-operatives in Greece are "production, organization and management of their co-operatives, promotion and advertising of their products and services, and capital raising" and very limited job creation potential of co-operatives (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 5).

Another research conducted through women's agricultural co-operatives in Greece focuses on chairwomen as heads of co-operatives, and this research demonstrated

some clues on the role of female chairpeople in only-women co-operatives. Research proves that chairwomen have more skilled than other members and have multiple and complex roles in the co-operatives. They have taken the initiative in solving conflicts among co-operative members. Their difference from other members has been that they stand out at the level of representation. It is clear that chairwomen in women's co-operatives have a managerial role rather than a leadership role (Aikaterini, 2015).

In the survey conducted in Greece in February 2000, the number of co-operative members was on average 30, with a maximum of 120 and a minimum of 15. Most of the co-operatives were established with a minimum number of 20 members and exceptionally 15 members according to the Law in force at the time of their establishment (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 6). At the beginning of the 2000s, it was observed that the number of co-operative members decreased compared to the past, while the number of new co-operatives established increased. This situation was evaluated as an indicator that women's co-operatives maintain their reputation (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 4).

A research with three women's co-operatives in Andalusia, Spain shows that women's co-operatives have a transformative potential regarding gender equality and this is a step in a transformation process (Gómez Carrasco, 2019, p. 62) Women's co-operatives contribute to supporting women's work-family balance (Gómez Carrasco, 2019, p. 58); develop a sense of achievement to response social problems and contribute to social justice (Gómez Carrasco, 2019, p. 59); provide positive changes through creating an alternative democratic and participatory business models basis on solidarity and sisterhood; create social innovative work and production space for challenging traditional gender roles (Gómez Carrasco, 2019, p. 60). In terms of government support, there are national and regional promotions throughout Spain. However, there are no women-specific grants and training. In a special context, there is support for women who are victims of violence (Gómez Carrasco, 2019, p. 54).

Co-operatives are seen as an important tool in macro-level development and poverty reduction, and in empowering women to achieve this goal. International organizations

that support the co-operative movement have made a special effort to increase women's participation in co-operatives at all levels, particularly in management and leadership positions.<sup>1</sup> Investing in women to ensure gender equality through the co-operative movement is significant in reducing poverty and development at the macro-level (COOP AFRICA, 2007, p. 5).

Various researches demonstrate that co-operatives are more interested in gender issues, women's leadership is increasing, female-only co-operatives are spreading, women's conflict resolution and co-operatives are linked, women's role in co-operatives is gaining importance in reducing poverty, it is an important tool for women's social empowerment, participation, and agent apart from the economic empowerment.

According to the literature, the co-operative model creates significant opportunities for employment of women in the rural areas, the informal economy, and low income via improving livelihoods and access to resources and services (Ryder, 2015). Although co-operatives are an important tool for women's participation in economic activities by fostering multidimensional empowerment to realize the greater potential, co-operatives need to open more space for women's leadership, gender equality strategies, and cooperation among other co-operatives (ICA & ILO, 2015).

## **2.4 Co-operatives in Turkey**

In this part, the main aim is to understand the general process of historical development, sectoral distribution over time, the role of the state and regulations, and the participation of women without efforts to engage in an in-depth analysis of co-operatives in Turkey. Therefore, starting with the outstanding developments in the historical process will be evaluated the features of the co-operative movement in Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> Promotion of Co-operatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193). Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_code:R193](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_code:R193)

### **2.4.1 Pre-Ottoman Empire**

The emergence of the organizational structure of co-operatives dates back to the pre-Ottoman period in Turkey. The history of co-operatives had started with the Ahi organization during the pre-Ottoman Empire period. Ahi organization, which means brotherhood organization, based on a set of moral, economic, social, and political values was established in the 12th century in Anatolia. Ahi organization is considered similar to co-operative organization that emerged later. Aside from economic interests, the system basis on social protection rejecting illegal and unjust gains, oppressions, and hierarchies between different socio-economic groups. *“Peaceful relations between the rich and the poor, the producer and consumer, the labor and capital, the nation and the state”* were adopted as the essentials of the system. The main principles for the membership of the organization were:

protecting the consumers’ and producers’ rights, trade (raw material provision and sale), pricing, marketing, production planning in terms of quality and quantity, educating youth in professional skills and trade ethics. Fairness also appeared to be one of the guiding principles. (Durutan-Okan & Okan, 2013, p. 8)

Although the Ahi organization was open to everyone's membership, it had an organizational structure that mainly includes tradesmen and craftsmen. The most important difference between the Guild organization, which emerged in the West at similar times and was thought to influence each other, and the Ahi organization was that while the Guilds had merely economic interest among craftsmen and tradesmen, the Ahi organization had interest also in social issues. Collective work (imece) in Anatolian culture was significant in Ahi organization, especially in rural areas. Lastly, as it is known that the Ahi organization established different but similar rules regarding social life for the male and female members, it is clear that women could also become members of the organization (Cora, 2017).

### **2.4.2 Ottoman Era**

After the Ahi organization, which continued until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the tradesmen organizations operating under the name of Breach and Guild until the beginning of the

20<sup>th</sup> century had a significant role in organizing the economic life of the society (Bilgin & Tanıyıcı, 2008, p. 138). It is thought that there were remarkable developments in terms of the emergence of the form that formed the basis for the establishment of co-operatives in the Ottoman Empire.

The modern history of co-operatives in Turkey has begun with the foundation of Homeland Funds (Memleket Sandıkları) in 1863 by Mithat Pasha in order to provide low-interest loans for the farmers during the Ottoman period. In such a system, the principles of free participation to co-operatives, democratic management, risturn, religious and political neutrality, and cooperation are carried out. Therefore, the establishment of Homeland Funds was considered as the first example of co-operatives (Özdemir & Başaran, 2003, p. 34). The main purpose of establishing was the cultivation of the empty state-belong land by peasants on their holidays and capital investment by the income obtained from the sale of the products. One-third of the income was distributed as profit among members at the end of the year. Although there was no grassroots demand by the producers, this attempt had come by a state official in order to provide alternative solutions to producers in economic difficulty. The first Homeland Funds were established in Pirot town in Rumelia in November 1863 during the Ottoman period. This initiative was regarded as the first example of co-operatives in Turkey. In 1867, the “Homeland Funds Regulation” was issued by the state as a state policy to spread over the country. This attempt had led to the foundation of the first state-led bank, Ziraat Bank (Agricultural Bank) in 1888 (Yıldırım-Kocabaş, 2011).

In the last period of the Ottoman Empire, problems in the economy gradually increased due to factors such as the economic crisis, the incompatibility of state policies and institutions with the existing socio-economic life. The biggest problems in terms of agricultural production were the insufficiency of agricultural credits, foreign exploitation on agricultural trade, the heavy tax liability of the peasants, limited market opportunity, large landowners versus small producers, and the failure to the expansion of co-operatives. Moreover, due to the lack of communication and transportation network between the agricultural production areas and the producers in the urban areas, it is stated that the big cities were supplied their compulsory food from abroad

(Yıldırım-Kocabaş, 2011, p. 47). Considering the current situation, the co-operative movement in Turkey has accelerated as required by unfavorable conditions in terms of agricultural production.

After the 2nd Constitutional Monarchy Era, the Union and Progress Party efforts to create a national economy. In this period co-operatives have accelerated in writings, researches and praxis. The co-operative movement, which accelerated across the world in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had an impact on the Ottoman Empire during this period, and some intellectuals had started in their writings that co-operatives are a significant revolution in the economy. They reported some examples on co-operatives around the world (Yıldırım-Kocabaş, 2011). In this period, while the intellectual interest in co-operatives increased, there were also developments in practice.

In 1900, "Village Groceries" were established as a consumption co-operative model in order to protect the villagers from the robber merchants and traveling merchants by their own resources and power under the leadership of Governor Kamil Pasha in Izmir Province (Yıldırım-Kocabaş, 2011, p. 42). This model had no difference in principle from today's consumption co-operatives. Besides, it is demonstrated that a consumption co-operative store was established in Trabzon Province in 1909, and consumer co-operative initiatives were found in various neighborhoods of Istanbul (Hazar, 1981, p. 14). In 1912, Aegean Region Agricultural Sales Co-operatives were established in Germencik in January, and in Aydın in February in order to eliminate the problems caused by external dependency and the monopoly in marketing, to facilitate the marketing of products, and established producer contracts for fig producers. In 1915, fig producers established a co-operative company by the initiatives of three fig producers, *Co-operative Aydın İncir Müstahsilleri Anonim Şirketi*, and this year is considered as the foundation date of the Tariş Fig Agricultural Sales Co-operatives Union was established (Tariş İncir Birliği, n.d.). These developments led by fig producers were significant in terms of the emergence of producers as actors in the first examples of the co-operative movement.

In general, the initial co-operative movement, which is claimed to lead off by Homeland Funds, has started by the initiative of state official, considered as local solutions as a requirement of adverse conditions in the pre-Republican era. While female membership was emphasized in the Ahi organization, there were not female and male membership distinctions in other forms of organizations in the reviewed literature in the early co-operative movements. Besides, the first examples are limited to the agricultural credit, production, and consumer co-operatives. Attempts to support co-operatives led by the state in the first stage are crucial because they will give us important clues as a state tradition while evaluating the current situation in Turkey.

### **2.4.3 Turkish Republican Era**

Before the very few years of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, a draft law on co-operative companies could not be passed, however, intellectual interest in co-operatives has continued in the newly founded country. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding leader of the country, made a significant effort to popularize co-operative system. In the Izmir Economics Congress in February 1923, the importance of collective working, specifically co-operative working was emphasized. In March 1923, the "Co-operative Companies" book was published with the encouragement of Atatürk. In this book, co-operative system and its benefits, types of co-operatives, differences from other companies, and co-operative companies from foreign countries were introduced. Besides, information on the management of co-operatives was explained. The importance of collective work on economic activities has been emphasized in various expressions in many cities by Atatürk. Co-operatives were presented as a way of both economic and social development, especially in rural areas. Until 1928, nearly 40 agricultural co-operatives were established according to a decree on co-operatives issued before October 1923, when the Republic was not yet established (Çıkmın, 2003, pp. 2-3). These attempts show that collective initiatives via co-operatives have been encouraged, and co-operatives have emerged as a significant path for development, especially in rural areas.



In the newly established state, co-operatives were seen as a way of development in the country where social and economic destruction was enormous with the severe effects of the war years. In addition to the co-operative model, Köy Kanunu (The Village Law)<sup>2</sup> of 1924 also aimed to provide social developments in rural life with the collective power of the people. The reason why this law is given as an example is that collective work was insistently encouraged for rural development. In this period, it can be urged that social development and economic development were not separated from each other in terms of political purposes, thus co-operatives were the best fit models that serve this purpose. It can straightforwardly be stated that social and economic development was momentous in the new state. Many legal arrangements have been made for various co-operatives in the country, respectively.

Initial regulations in this area were the adaptation of the İtibari Zirai Birlikler Kanunu (Nominal Agricultural Unions Law) with Law No. 498 in 1924. This law stipulates the establishment of independent agricultural credit co-operatives and agricultural sales co-operatives, however, law-based initiatives had failed. In 1929, agricultural credit co-operatives were established under the control of Ziraat Bank by abolishing the reputational Agricultural Unions with the law numbered 1470. The oldest of the Agricultural Credit Co-operatives which are still active today are those established according to Law No. 1470. Co-operatives were separated from other capital companies in the Türk Ticaret Kanunu (Turkish Commercial Code) numbered 865 enacted in 1926. In 1935, the Agricultural Sales Co-operatives and Unions Law No. 2834 and the Agricultural Credit Co-operatives Law No. 2836 were enacted. Until the 1950s, there was no significant development in co-operative system, with the effect of the WWII (Canbaş, 1986, p. 33). Following the legal regulations, the co-operatives have also diversified in terms of their purposes. It is noticed that the first housing co-operative and a small number of unions were established, and the number of co-operatives increased in the fields of production, consumption, sales, and credit (Çıkmın, 2003, p. 9). As of 1923, efforts to establish a legal basis and to spread the idea of co-

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.442.pdf>

operatives practically ensured the spread of co-operatives other than agricultural purposes.

While evaluating Atatürk's relationship with the co-operative until his death in 1938, some points came to the fore. Çıkın (2003) states that Atatürk considered co-operatives as a tool of development, supported the intellectual and academic research on co-operatives, initiated to integration into the university curriculums and some research institutions, and lastly pioneered the legal establishment of co-operatives and was membered in some (pp. 10-11). In this period, it can be said that the state gave an ideological development mission to the co-operatives and made plenty of encouragements for this purpose.

In the 1950s, new regulations in co-operatives have continued. In the Turkish Commercial Code enacted in 1956, the section related to Commercial Companies regulations were included co-operatives. Kooperatifler Kanunu (The Co-operatives Law) No. 1163, enacted in 1969, was the first legal regulation specific to co-operatives. After the enactment of this law, the number of co-operatives started to increase rapidly. This law has been important in terms of establishing co-operative unions and combining the regulations issued at different times with a single law (Canbaş, 1986, p. 34). The number of co-operatives between 1969-1979 increased approximately 11 times compared to the previous 20 years (Durutan-Okan & Okan, 2013, p. 12).

Canbaş (1986) claims that the grassroots co-operative movement has accelerated in the 1960s with the establishment of multi-purpose rural development co-operatives. However, this development may not mean that the co-operative movement has accelerated by grassroots demand because a law giving priority to labor migration to foreign countries was enacted to villagers who established co-operatives in 1965. In this case, it can be said that establishing a co-operative was particularly a state-supported project in this period and this model is not compatible with the co-operative principles. At that point, although the difference between state support and intervention is blurry, it will be meaningful when evaluating the damage of the state's

interventions to the co-operative movement, especially when evaluating women's co-operatives. It can be argued that the increase in the number of co-operatives in the villages during this period caused many inactive co-operatives even still today in the villages leading to financial burden and visible unsuccessful models, rather than the development of the village.

Furthermore, various models and projects regarding co-operatives have been included in the 5-Year Development Plans since 1962. Those plans indicate the state's responsibility to develop co-operatives. Principally, co-operatives have been under state support by measurement since by 1960 Civil Code that urges the state's responsible position, particularly the beginning of the state intervention. In addition, the traditional role of the state "delayed their development to become mature entities responsible for their operations, failures and successes", since some lived or preferred to exist under the wings of the state created significant financial burden on the state budget, strained the judicial system and kindled social problems within time" (Durutan-Okan & Okan, 2013, pp. 12-13).

#### **2.4.4 Co-operatives among Sectors**

The state has been obliged to take the necessary measures for the development of co-operatives, and the state has taken an active role in the development of co-operatives according to article 171 of the 1982 Constitution. In this process, the state has provided program-based support to the development of co-operatives. By the year 2012, Turkey Co-operative Strategy and Action Plans were put into operation, and it was aimed to achieve qualitative growth rather than quantitative growth in line with strategic goals (Gümrük ve Ticaret Bakanlığı Kooperatifçilik Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017, pp. 4-5).

Since the Co-operatives Law in 1969, co-operatives have been divided into agricultural and non-agricultural, and specialization in co-operatives has started. According to the last data in 2016 provided by the Ministry of Customs and Trade, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, and Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation, 37 different types of co-operatives have been founded according to their

fields of activity. Those types from high to low in number are; housing co-operative, agricultural development co-operative, motor transport co-operative, irrigation co-operative, consumption co-operative, agricultural credit co-operative, collective workplace housing co-operative, credit-guarantee co-operative, housing co-operatives in small industry areas, business co-operative, fisheries co-operative, production marketing co-operatives, passenger transportation co-operative, tourism development co-operative, agricultural sales co-operative, supply and delivery co-operative, small art co-operative, cargo transport co-operative, women's enterprise production and operation co-operative, education co-operative, beet planters co-operative, fresh fruit and vegetable co-operatives, real estate business co-operative, publishing co-operative, assistance co-operative, maritime passenger transport co-operative, renewable energy production co-operative, service co-operative, supply co-operative, insurance co-operative, porter carrier co-operative, stallholder business co-operative, health services co-operative, scientific research and development co-operative, marine freight transport co-operative, press and broadcast communication co-operative, intellectual property rights and project consultancy co-operative. This long list shows that there is separation among co-operatives even in similar activities. This long list shows that there is diversification among co-operatives. According to the data from 2016, there are 53,259 co-operatives and 7,422,994 members in total (Gümrük ve Ticaret Bakanlığı Kooperatifçilik Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017, p. 13).

#### **2.4.5 General Trends on Co-operative System**

The very brief information about the historical development of co-operatives addresses main characteristics of the co-operative system in Turkey in the light of history. As some features have continued past to present, I suppose that some clues will guide on the following part of the study where women's co-operatives will be evaluated.

In the historical process, although any co-operatives have emerged within its modern sense, the organizational structure of the Ahi organization demonstrates that a co-operative-like structure dates back to the 12th century in the Anatolian territory. For the first time, the formation of organizations similar to modern co-operatives with the

Homeland Funds shows that state officials had played a pivotal role in the foundation of those organizations. Over time, the development of co-operatives was desired by state leaders in modern Turkey. The state has undertaken a role in the development of co-operatives with various laws, action plans, and projects. A few efforts were emerged to establish collective initiatives, like fig producers, from the bottom in the early Turkish Republican era. Although the desire of the state or state officials to be directly involved in co-operatives was recorded as positive developments in the establishment processes, such desire seems to continue as a tradition today. This situation points to the existence of significant threats in particular for women's co-operatives, which will be discussed in the following part. Therefore, the dominant and guiding attitudes of the state and state officials towards co-operatives may be considered as a significant clue as to a tradition of the historical process that continues today.

Moreover, co-operatives or collective initiatives have been a way of development and social welfare in the historical process. Co-operatives have been proposed as one of the means to stimulate development in times of significant economic and social depression and restructuring. The approach to development in this period is not only economic gain, but a response to the adverse conditions in crisis periods. It can be said that it is a development approach that encourages the people of the region to use resources in a self-sufficient manner. In the light of this information, evaluating the current situation of the women's co-operatives that are the focus of the study, I argue that today, the social development approach to development is far distanced. Considering the goals of self-sufficiency and sustainable social development, employment-oriented approach on women's co-operatives overlooks the potential of grassroots movement. Such a situation indicates a break from the holistic approach to development. This does not mean that all women's co-operatives work solely bare on economic goals, on the contrary, it makes it necessary to investigate the existence of factors and actors that lead to such an approach.

When the sectoral distribution is examined, it is seen that even the co-operatives working in a similar field go to a great separation. Co-operatives operate in various

fields. However, in the historical process, it is seen that more concentration in rural areas, co-operatives have emerged in the especially agricultural activity areas. Starting from the Ottoman period, important roles were assigned to the co-operatives in the rural areas where the connection with the urban area could not be established adequately. On a sectoral basis, agricultural co-operatives have been established in these regions and these agricultural credit co-operatives have been established in line with the needs. Over time, there has been a sectoral differentiation and development between agricultural and non-agricultural co-operatives.

Lastly, when the presence of women in previous co-operatives was tried to be investigated, a big gap was encountered. While the history of co-operatives in its modern sense is seen as the history of the co-operative of men, there are findings that women also participated in the organization of the Ahi, but in modern co-operatives, there is no data on sex segregation in the official data. Data on the place of women in co-operatives start with women in women's co-operatives. In 2016, it is stated that there are 55 women's co-operatives with 640 members, and co-operatives with titled women are 141 in total (Gümrük ve Ticaret Bakanlığı Kooperatifçilik Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017, p. 13, 55). After 3 years, the number of women's co-operatives increased to 108 with 1427 members (Gümrük ve Ticaret Bakanlığı Kooperatifçilik Genel Müdürlüğü, 2019). According to the latest data stated by the Directorate General of Tradesmen, Craftsmen, and Co-operatives under the Ministry of Trade, the number of women's co-operatives and women entrepreneurial co-operatives, those number has rapidly increased, has reached around 350 across the country<sup>3</sup>. I would like to reemphasize that the history of modern co-operatives has been the history of men's co-operatives until the 2000s. This is essential because, as will be discussed in detail in the discussion of the necessity of building women's co-operatives, spatially segregating themselves from men, and whether there are sexist structures, women strive to create a space for themselves in the co-operative movement.

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<sup>3</sup> The latest number of the women's co-operatives and women entrepreneurial co-operatives unofficially stated by the Head of Department, General Directorate of Tradesmen, Craftsmen and Co-operatives in the news. Retrieved on 20 November, 2020 from: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/kadin-kooperatiflerinin-sayisi-artiyor/2015190#>

## **2.5 Women's Co-operatives**

In the historical process, various structures have been under the control of men and those managed by men. Since the women's co-operatives movement began in the early 2000s, a new space has opened for women to establish collective socio-economic initiatives in Turkey. In this part, the establishment of women's co-operatives, legislative regulations, and the literature on women's co-operatives will be presented. The main approaches of the existing studies on women's co-operatives will be discussed. Lastly, the similarities between the co-operative movement and women's co-operatives in the historical process and its distinctive features will be evaluated.

Before the discussion, I intend to address my research definition of women's co-operatives in the context of Turkey. Women's co-operatives are structures established and operated by women, facilitating the participation of women in social and economic life, working for both social and economic purposes in their activities. In other words, women's co-operatives are a female-specific structures endeavoring to reduce economic and social inequalities based on gender in the society, serving social development as well as creating employment for women at a local level. They operate through social concerns, particularly satisfy the non-economic needs of women, and contribute to. The fact that women's co-operatives operate towards social concern and contribute to development is due to the basic principles of co-operatives, as emphasized in the definition of ICA, not because they are women's co-operatives. Those are one of the ultimate goals of co-operatives in principle, although in practice this is not the case under all circumstances. Such an ideal notion is not claiming that all women's co-operatives work through social concerns, but it can be said that their potential will be investigated in the literature review and fieldwork in the study. Such examining is also critical in terms of discussing the legitimacy of the existence of women's co-operatives, as will be discussed in more detail in the following parts of the study.

In this context, I would like to emphasize that I am not claiming that women's co-operatives are the ultimate or the best fit models for satisfying women's social and

economic needs. I, therefore, would like to understand how and what extend women's co-operatives have the potential to satisfy women's social and economic needs. While discussing the question, I would like to address the context of the establishment process, social and economic activities they do, their difference from other co-operative types, and the role of actors like NGOs, local governments, and the state from a gender lens. The gender dimension of the evaluation of women's co-operatives will be clarified in the literature review. First, I will point out their establishment process and the legal status to better understand these structures before the literature review.

### **2.5.1 The History of the Women's Co-operatives**

The history of women's co-operatives in Turkey dates to the recent past in the early 2000s. Despite the 20 years since the first women's co-operatives were established, there is still a literature gap on this subject. Academic articles and theses, official reports of NGOs and public institutions, official statements of Ministry representatives are the main resources of information. However, these resources are still insufficient to map the organizational structure, institutional capacity, socio-economic activities and understand the main challenges. Because, especially in the last two years, there has been a rapid increase in the number of women's co-operatives and growing interest in this field. While there were about 200 women's co-operatives in 2019, the number of women's co-operatives exceeded 1000 by 2021. Still, more research is needed to understand this growing interest and growing pattern. This study intends to present a broad perspective on women's co-operatives by using different sources.

The establishment of the pioneering initiatives dates to the foundation of the Women and Children Center by grassroots women with the support of FSSW in the post-earthquake period after the earthquakes of 17 August and 12 November 1999<sup>4</sup>. As of 2002, grassroots women have started to establish women's co-operatives, and they started to operate Women and Children Centers. It can be said that the establishment

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved on 2 May 2021, from <https://www.niluferkadin.org/niluferkoop/>



process emerged as a need-oriented organizational model under the leadership of grassroots women.

According to the legislation, women's co-operatives are subjected to the Co-operatives Law No. 1163 and affiliated with the Ministry of Trade. Within the framework of the legal legislation prepared by the Ministry, women's co-operatives were established with the title of *Women, Environment, Culture, and Management Co-operative* from 2011 to 2013. Since the arrangement prepared in 2013, they have been establishing with the title of *Women's Initiative Production and Management Co-operative*.

According to the Charter<sup>5</sup>, their establishment aims are to operate in line with the economic, social, and cultural needs of members, improving the production and marketing capacities, and ensure that they live in a healthy and developed environment. Membership requirements include being a citizen of the Republic of Turkey, being a woman who can fulfil civil rights, or be a public or private legal entity operating following the purpose of the co-operative. At that point, it is necessary to mention some recent changes to the membership requirement since the underlying contract is the ideal text and may subject to change with approval of the Ministry. Turkish citizenship requirement in membership can be changed by amendment to the Charter. It is known that refugee and migrant women can become members in women's co-operatives. Besides, men can be also member in women's co-operatives with the recent contract amendments as it is known from the field. The number of members of the co-operative must be at least 7 people. They do not distribute risturn to their members. They can operate in many fields of activities. The prominent activities are as follows:

- Marketing, advertisement, and sales of the goods and services produced by the members in the country and abroad,

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<sup>5</sup>Women's Co-operative Charter. Retrieved from:  
<http://koop.gtb.gov.tr/data/549179fcf293703cbcd0b58/4-KADIN%20G%C4%B0R%C4%B0C5%9E%C4%B0M%C4%B0%20%C3%9CRET%C4%B0M%20VE%20%C4%B0C5%9ELETME%20KOOPERAT%C4%B0F%C4%B0%20ANAS%C3%96ZLE%C5%9EMES%C4%B0.pdf>

- Provide productive skills courses for members and non-member (beneficiary) women,
- Organizing trainings, courses, and workshops,
- To operate or facilitate to operate various businesses, workshops in line with their purposes,
- To organize social and cultural activities to increase social interaction between partners and their relatives,
- Operating daily care centers and children's playrooms of 0-6 age groups for the care and education in the neighbourhood for their partners and non-partners,
- Establishing and operating library, reading room, art gallery, sports, and theatre activity units for cultural development,
- Establishing necessary health units to carry out works such as health screening and medication assistance for the partners and their relatives,
- Cooperating with all public and private institutions and non-governmental organizations
- Carrying out informative, educational, and income-generating activities on environmental issues,
- Organizing the consultancy services that the members will need,
- Employing experts for social work and consultancy services.

The aforementioned fields of activities constitute a basis for co-operatives' activities in various fields of activity for both economic and social benefits. Examining the field areas pointed out for non-economic purposes in the text, it is seen that the fields of activity such as sewing, jewelry design, souvenirs, and food, which are widely seen as female work in the patriarchal societies, are pointed out. In addition, care services, which are considered as women's responsibility in patriarchal societies, have been mentioned within the scope of activity of women's co-operatives. In these respects, the charter was accused of being sexist (Kurtege-Sefer, 2020, p. 120). This issue should be carefully considered whether these areas of economic activity are an alternative way for women to participate in employment or restrict them around the feminine roles defined by the patriarchal structure. Beyond the document analysis, I believe that the analysis of this issue requires carefully investigate and evaluate female members'

educational background, social and economic position, womanhood status in society. This issue was also addressed to the respondents as a question in the field research and will be discussed in detail in the analysis section.

### **2.5.2 Multi-Purpose<sup>6</sup> Model of Empowerment: Women's Co-operatives**

Since women's co-operatives operate in various fields and serves to beyond economic purposes, they are called multi-purpose co-operatives (Duguid et al., 2015, p. 16). The fields of activities have been demonstrated by a few nation-wide researches. In the literature, the establishment purposes of women's co-operatives have focused on certain topics. The establishment purposes of women's co-operatives are mostly women's participation to employment, social empowerment of women, and common solution to common issues of women (Duguid et al., 2015). Women's co-operatives have been considering as the most ideal organizational model by women to develop collective solutions to common problems and needs (Özdemir, 2013, p, 304). Those structures enable women to make economic gains, psychological and social empowerment as well (Varol, 2013; Cinar et al., 2019).

### **2.5.3 Women's Co-operatives in Official Reports, Documents, and Projects**

In the *Gender Equality National Action Plan 2008-2013*, encouraging women's entrepreneurship in agriculture-based business, supporting the establishment of co-operatives by women, and the increase of women's membership in existing co-operatives were targeted (KSGM, 2008). In the *Women's Empowerment Strategy Document and Action Plan 2018-2023*, it has been aimed to increase the support of women's co-operatives through training and consultancy and cooperation for marketing of the co-operatives' products will be carried out, especially with local governments (KSGM, 2018).

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<sup>6</sup> Women's co-operatives have been described as multi-purpose co-operatives in this resource: Duguid, F., Durutaş, G., Wodzicki, M. (2015). *The current state of women's co-operatives in Turkey*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

*The Promotion of Women's Co-operatives and Capacity Development Project* (Kadın Kooperatifleri Tanıtım ve Kapasite Geliştirme Projesi) initiated by the Ministry of Trade since 2012, has been aimed at the promotion of co-operatives, increase of women in co-operatives, strengthen the existing co-operatives, and establish a network around a strong union.<sup>7</sup> Within the scope of this project, a nutshell booklet<sup>8</sup> related to women's co-operatives was prepared and training programs<sup>9</sup> were organized. In 2018, the Cooperation Protocol on Empowering Women's Co-operatives (Kadın Kooperatiflerini Güçlendirme İş birliği Protokolü) was signed between the Ministry of Family Labor and Social Services, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Trade. The Protocol aims to boosting women's co-operatives, strengthen their institutional capacities, promotion of co-operatives, and increase participation of women in social and economic life through co-operatives. Projects planned to be carried out within the scope of the protocol; Women's Co-operatives Promotion and Capacity Building Project, Co-operative E-certificate Program, Co-operative Development, and Adaptation Training. In addition, it is foreseen to develop reformative suggestions for the legislation, awareness-raising activities, production of written materials, cooperation with public institutions, NGOs, and universities that are working in the field of women's co-operatives.<sup>10</sup> In 2020, *Empowering Women through Co-operatives Project* (Kadınların Kooperatifler Yoluyla Güçlendirilmesi Projesi) initiated by General Directorate of Women's Status (KSGM) and it is targeted that:

6000 women and 3000 men will benefit from trainings and services; institutional capacity building activities will be carried out for 585 people; 1200 people will be reached through awareness activities; 5 scientific and technical study reports will be prepared; 5 events will be organized to ensure cooperation and coordination<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup><https://www.ticaret.gov.tr/kooperatifcilik/projeler/tamamlanan-projeler/kadin-kooperatifleri-tanitim-ve-kapasite-gelistirme-projesi-kadin-koop>

<sup>8</sup><https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5d41e05813b87639ac9e029e/46521a800808d66503e3e85099666507.pdf>

<sup>9</sup><https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5d41e05813b87639ac9e029e/7a57d7526dcc9fe852a728cd82295c22.pdf>

<sup>10</sup><https://www.ailevecalisma.gov.tr/uploads/ksqm/uploads/pages/mevzuat/kooperatif-protokol-imzali.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ikg.gov.tr/empowering-women-through-co-operatives-womencoop/?lang=en>

in 30 months. Lastly, the Ministry of Commerce implemented the scope of the Support Program for Co-operatives (Kooperatiflerin Desteklenmesi Programı), in which they gave support grants of up to 150.000 TL to the co-operatives whose 90% of their members were women in 2020 and 2021.<sup>12</sup> It is noticed that the public institutions have started to support women's co-operatives increasingly in the last ten years by creating funds, promotion, and awareness-raising activities, and supporting them with several technic services and training. However, since no information about monitoring and evaluation was available, the effects of such supports are unknown.

#### **2.5.4 Identifying the Model**

Although there is no clear definition of women's co-operatives in the literature, there are some conceptualizations in terms of their purposes and forms of organization. The first and foremost comprehensive research on women's co-operatives "*The Current State of Women's Co-operatives in Turkey*" report shows that women's co-operatives organized around the economic and social purposes. They are located at the crossing divide between organizations with purely economic purposes and purely social purposes. Besides, those co-operatives are called "*multi-purpose women's co-operatives*" due to the various activities they carry out and various purposes they have (Duguid et al., 2015).

The establishment of women's co-operatives in Turkey is mainly related with country-specific dynamics. While women's participation to the co-operatives is high in number in many parts of the world, co-operatives are male-dominated spheres in Turkey. From this point of view, it can be said that women's co-operatives are small-scale local organizations where women come together in line with their own needs, produce goods and services in various fields of activity for income-generating or/and social purposes,

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<sup>12</sup> <https://ticaret.gov.tr/kooperatifcilik/koop-des>

support the social and economic empowerment of women, and contribute to local development.

Women has stated their own roles in national women's co-operative meetings organized by FFSW:

In 2001, FSWW, together with the local women's groups it works with, started a study to develop a model for the needs-oriented organization of poor women. In this context, the co-operative was presented as a suitable form of organization. FSWW prepared a sample of articles of association suitable for the needs and ensured the establishment of the first co-operatives. In Turkey, women's co-operatives movement has been initiated. (FSWW, 2008)

A forest was burned, while the animals were running away, a small sparrow was trying to put out the fire, filled its beak with water from a nearby puddle, dropped it on the fire and brought it back again. Other animals said, do you think you can put out this fire with your tiny beak? At least I am not watching like you, I am trying to do something. I liken us to this, we strive for women to be empowered, to do something. (FSWW, 2005)

We thought we were the only co-operative to deal with these problems until today. We were not alone. We agreed on both problems and solutions. (FSWW, 2005)

With these particular statements of women in women's co-operatives, they identified their active role in a movement. At this point, it is seen that women have an activist role in that movement, and they have undertaken the mission of developing this movement.

As of their goals it can be said that the co-operative movement is of great significance for the achieving gender-equality through filling gender gap in the economic and social dimension. Thus, studying on their current capacity is crucial in revealing the potential of the growing women's co-operative movement.

### **2.5.5 Existing Literature**

Academic researches on women's co-operatives in Turkey have emerged in the 2010s and has gradually increased in recent years. Methodologically, women's co-operatives have been analyzed via literature review, secondary sources, official reports, discourse

analysis, and interviews. In terms of praxis, nationwide researches and case studies have been focused. In this part, I will attempt to address the missing line by proposing a general framework on women's co-operatives literature in Turkey via existing researches that still be considered limited.

Initial research was conducted by Gülen Özdemir (2013) with 34 out of 36 women's co-operatives at the end of 2005. In 2009, it is stated that the number of women's co-operatives have increased to 93 (p. 302). Özdemir (2013) conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews with three members and one manager in each co-operative and tested possible relations between the active/inactive status of the co-operative and demographic profiles of the members, however, no relation was found.

In her research, Özdemir (2013) determined three types of co-operatives. The first group of co-operatives were founded by particular institutions, such as FSWW, municipalities, and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and those co-operatives are mainly directed by such institutions. The second group of co-operatives have social concerns and goals, the last co-operative groups operate locally (p. 302). All co-operatives have future plans, and the main problems of co-operatives are in the areas of marketing, finance, and legislation. Considering that women in co-operatives are generally low-income, poor women, the main problem is the lack of high-capital. Co-operatives that have financial difficulties seek need of municipality or state led support. Besides, the common member profile is low-educated women. Although they wanted to establish a union, they stated that it is difficult to establish with low-educated people. It is demonstrated that women's co-operatives need to volunteer women leaders, active participation of all members, support of volunteers and local people. In order to overcome their financial difficulties, they need to better understand the market conditions, produce different products and to expand their market channels, and establish contacts with large companies. Besides, women also need to learn to act and work together (p. 303). Furthermore, women in co-operatives believe that co-operative structure is the best fit model for creating collective solutions to common problems and needs of women and support. They serve as non-governmental organizations aside

from economic concerns, and co-operative managers are aware of the co-operative principles, structure, and organization (p. 303-304).

Özdemir (2013) states that women's co-operatives are bottom-to-top movement organizing around "their real needs, and this is a desired situation particularly favored by co-operative people" and women's co-operatives as economic models are a significant step towards society's democracy (p. 305).

Günay and Demirci-Aksoy (2018) seek the relations between female poverty and women's co-operatives in terms of sustainable development. This study suggests that women's co-operatives can be a pioneer in reducing the poverty of women, creating locally sustainable models from the women's perspective by narrowly demonstrating the existing Turkish-written and international literature. Referring to the target of public institutions in Turkey, and international actors without any significant quantitative or qualitative data from praxis, this study could not provide meaningful relations between sustainable development and women's co-operatives. Similarly, in terms of Sustainable Development Agenda of 2030, Duygu Kızıldağ focused on the ability of women's co-operatives to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Her research suggests that women's co-operatives contribute to at least three of the SDGs which are eliminating poverty, promoting gender equality, and economic growth through literature review analysis (Kızıldağ, 2019). With the stress of the link between women's co-operatives and SDGs, more studies highlight that women's co-operatives are sufficient instruments for promoting women in economic activities, and will make major contributions to achieving the 2023 goals (Emiroğlu, 2012, p. 5). In addition to these studies that make general assessments of co-operatives in the literature, more research focusing on case studies has been found.

In Turkey, the first and foremost research on the rural women-led co-operative, *The Village of Yağlar Agricultural Development Co-operative* that was established with government funding, was studied by Firdevs Gümüšoğlu in 2012. The case study is based on oral history interviews with co-operative members and male villagers during the four-times visits to Yağlar Village in Izmir Province. Gümüšoğlu (2012)



demonstrates that the increase in the inadequacy of organizing among producers and the absence of strong co-operatives in this sector as in EU have caused the problems in agricultural production to turn into broad socio-economic problems in the neoliberal globalization process in Turkey. As a result of poverty, women and children have been the most affected by its socio-economic impacts (pp. 42-43). Under such circumstances, the case study investigates the women's resistance and collective response to the severe effects of the structural adjustment policies in the globalization process on agricultural production and marketing by establishing co-operative in the village and their socio-economic impact scale. The co-operative has 103 female members. In terms of economy, main problems are inadequate earning and the consequent decrease in production and lacking sufficient productivity and marketing channels, insufficient qualified production for the market demand, dependence on loans, women's less earning than men's. It was observed that the economic problems are partially resolved for those who participate in productive activities after the co-operative was established (Gümüšoğlu, 2012). Moreover, this study also gives us the chance to follow the social change.

In Yağcılar Village, women's lives were limited to household work and subsistence family business previously. After joining the co-operative, they started to participate in meetings, and engage in the management of the co-operative, establish relations with official institutions, host the co-operative visitors, even attending international training. Moreover, it was stated that after the women's co-operative was established, solidarity in the village increased, signs of change were observed in the household division of labor, the social position of women strengthened, women's self-confidence increased and men started to praise women's achievements (Gümüšoğlu, 2012, pp. 48, 56, 58). Lastly, this study also shows women's motivation to organize around the female-only co-operatives. As Gümüšoğlu (2012) reported from her interviews, the solidarity between women would be damaged and women would risk of male-dominance in mixed structure co-operative since men would seek to make decisions on everything (p. 45). Those answers given by women based on their own experiences may suggest why women did not take part in mixed-structures before, or if there were no female-only co-operatives, they would never have taken part. This study presents

significant clues on the impact of women's co-operatives on socio-economic empowerment and contributions to the region and women's motivation in establishing women's co-operatives.

In 2017, Yasin Barut researched on *Hıdırlık Agricultural Development Co-operative* as a case study from Seferihisar District, Izmir Province. The research aimed to investigate women's co-operatives' contribution on. Interviews were conducted with both chairperson of the executive board and members of the co-operative. According to the findings, the co-operative has led to an increase in female employment, creation of the new brand, encourage good farming and clean production, increase healthy living standards, encouraging agricultural production, decrease in migration to big cities, and increase in the logistic activity in the town due to the e-commerce of co-operatives. In addition to earning money, women have become more active and visible in the social life and more willing to have their children/grandchildren pursue higher education. Besides, it is stated that the success of women has led to a revival in the tourism sector, new investments, and increased land values in the town. Shortly, it is suggested that the establishment of the women's co-operative contributed to development in the town (Barut, 2017). Moreover, the two most important points about the success of the co-operative are pointed out by the scholar. First, the District Mayor supported the establishment of a women's co-operative in the town related to his project of "Citta-Slow City". Second, the mayor's spouse is involved in the process, and she is one of the founder members (Barut, 2017, p. 126). However, it is unclear whether the co-operative was established as a business model or a participatory, democratic, and sustainable structure. Besides, the increase in land value because of the arrival of foreign investors in the town, raises the question of how this development improves the welfare of the local people or affects non-landowners. The fact that this co-operative is a part of the projects of the mayor in the town and the mayor's spouse is one of the founders and still holds the chairpeopleship should be considered sceptically in terms of the autonomy, participation in decision-making, and democratic structure of the co-op.

In 2017, Ebru Özer-Topaloğlu and Murat Topaloğlu researched on *Bacıyan-ı Meram Woman Entrepreneur Production and Operation Co-operative* as a case study from Meram District, Konya Province. Their analysis is based on the statements of the founder representative in the news, and information basis on the web page of the co-operative. The Bacıyan-ı Meram co-operative which was established in 2015 operates in the production and marketing of traditional food products, and clothing, souvenirs. Bacıyan-ı Meram has more than 600 female members and 60 of them are permanently working part-time (Özer-Topaloğlu & Topaloğlu, 2017, p. 214). The scholars state that the co-operative was established by the female mayor of Meram District Municipality, aiming to employ housewives and produce projects that consider the socio-cultural and economic needs of women. Women of the co-operative produce in the co-operative building allocated by the municipality or home-based (Özer-Topaloğlu & Topaloğlu, 2017, p. 215). Based on those, Özer-Topaloğlu and Topaloğlu (2017) had drawn inferences from the case study. It has been suggested that state support or state-led projects, and municipality-level assistance will create new employment opportunities and increase income as in the case study. However, only 10% of the more than 600 female members with merely part-time opportunities employed. If so, only a small group has the employment opportunity, it cannot straightforwardly prove that the co-operative provides new employment opportunities. Besides, such issues are not clear that how and to what extent 90% of the co-operative members participate in the activities of the co-operative and being responded to their socio-cultural needs. Lastly, there is no clue how and to what extent the autonomy and democracy in the Bacıyan-ı Meram Co-operative were realized in a structure established by the District Mayor with the support of the District Municipality. Lastly, some questions have arisen about the co-operative what happened after the changes in Major of Meram District in 2019 whether the new major still give similar support and how the impact of changes in political actors on the sustainability of co-operatives.

In 2018, Duygu Kızıldağ and Anıl Buğra Karataş researched on *Urla Women's Co-operative* from Urla District, Izmir Province In this study, women's motivation to establish and become members of co-operatives were investigated through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 14 co-operative members. This study shows that

being a member of a co-operative provides solidarity among women, brings out their creativity, participates in social life, sharing common problems and information. Members did not mention any disadvantages caused by the co-operative. Moreover, this study also reveals that women's co-operatives enable female participation in socio-economic enterprise since two of the interviewees emphasized that their husbands allow them to work as they wanted to participate in women's co-operative where all members are female (Kızıldağ & Karataş, 2018).

As a result of this finding, it can be clearly considered that women's co-operatives enable bargaining with patriarchy for the socio-economic empowerment of women in a society where the patriarchal structure restricts women. Similarly, is also though that in a closed community, women's socio-economic participation is easier through women's co-operatives (Dalkıran, 2017, p. 9).

In 2020, Pelin Demircan-Yıldırım researched on *Ahlatli Women's Co-operative* from Kas District, Antalya Province. The data were collected via the official website and interviews conducted by phone call with the head of the board members in order to investigate their role in the development of Antalya. Although it is unclear how and to what extent the Ahlatli women's co-operative contribute to rural development, it is recommended to establish more women's co-operatives in Antalya, where agricultural production potential is high, to prevent immigration from rural areas due to the lack of agricultural production and to organize women who participate in agricultural production as unpaid family workers (Demircan-Yıldırım, 2020).

### **2.5.6 An Evaluation of the Turkish Case**

Existing literature provides informations on co-operatives' fields of activity, participant profile, establishment stories, and women's empowerment. However, women's empowerment and gender equality, type of works, democratic governance, participation in decisionmaking processes, non-economic activities, relations between external environment, and their contribution to local development should be investigated more broadly.

Although the role of the local governments' support, state assistance, and projects on the sustainability have been emphasized in many studies, case studies from some districts show that political actors have directly participated in the co-operative structure and even lead co-operatives. The current situation may raise the problem of sustainability by depending on external aid without creating their own financial resources. Moreover, if women's co-operatives are highly dependent on those external aids, might they not be strong models? The dependency status of women's co-operatives and their relationships with state or non-state actors more likely require further research.

In terms of development, the general focus is on case studies on rural women's co-operatives. In many studies, it is unclear how and to what extent women's co-operatives contribute to rural development. Moreover, the impact of urban co-operatives on socio-economic development is still uncertain. A study focusing on co-operatives at the urban level from Istanbul Province does not provide significant findings on the capacity of co-operatives, as it focuses more on women's empowerment (Varol, 2013). Even it is claimed that women's co-operatives facilitate regional and national progress (Dalkıran, 2017, p. 9), there is a gap of data on how and to what extent women's co-operatives serve such progress.

Based on the existing information in the literature, the general profile of the members, working areas, non-economic activities, remuneration models, solidarity among co-operatives, relations with the external environment, and the impact of central and local governments will be investigated in the field research of this study. The main question sought to be answered by this research is whether co-operatives can create an alternative development model for women in the current economic system.

Moreover, it is crucial to understand whether the women's co-operative model itself has positive effects on women, unlike the traditional co-operative model. If it is to be an alternative model for women, it must include some progress in terms of gender equality. In addition, it will be critical to find out how this model, whose contribution

to development has been heavily mentioned in national and international literature, contributes to development with its various dimensions.

Finally, it is important to understand whether women's co-operatives can overcome the agricultural production-oriented work, economic benefit focus, male domination, and state-supported/ state interventionism structure in economic activities, which are the main axis in the tradition of co-operatives in Turkey in order to understand whether the women's co-operative move.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The critiques of the feminist post-development approach to women and development framework have gained more importance in a deeper and prolonged crisis within countries and on a global scale. With the negative impacts caused by the development programs, new goals emerged to reduce inequality and poverty. The new approach to the development proposed "sustainable development goals" by promoting sustainable growth (Dacheux & Goujon, 2011). However, women's autonomous and independent economic initiatives based on solidarity have asserted a way, an alternative approach to their empowerment. Women's co-operatives in Turkey are one of the alternative organizational forms. They operate to respond not only to economic needs but also to social, cultural, and political needs with their creative solutions.

In this study, it is claimed that women's co-operatives are key agents of the SSE aiming to support and fostering women's empowerment and gender equality, thereby reducing multidimensional inequalities through alternative economic organizing. One of the values and principles of the SSE emphasize an alternative framework which promotes equality, equity, and justice for all. At this point, it is important to investigate if women's co-operatives are a step toward gender equality by empowering women and promoting the SSE as well. The potential of women's co-operatives is sought to analyze as the SSE actors, but not specific co-operative entities. This is for the fact that women's co-operatives have distinct features of the traditional co-operative movement in Turkey. It is a newly emerging multipurpose model created by women from different profiles in different regions, urban and rural areas. Besides, this model

emerged as a new form of organization that differs from the traditional co-operative models in terms of women's needs and priorities in Turkey. In this aspect, considering women's co-operatives not within the co-operative movement but as agents within the SSE, which has turned into a transformative movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, may reveal its potential in a wider network within the global context.

Before the discussion, it is important to draw a link between the SSE and women's co-operatives that will be discussed, aiming to unleash invisible potential far beyond gender equality. In this part, at first, I will focus on the social economy and solidarity economy, which we can be referred to as the predecessor of the SSE concept, in a historical and contextual framework. Then, explaining the SSE approach of this study will facilitate and become more meaningful to discuss women's co-operatives in this framework.

Despite many discussions and efforts to create a common framework, no accepted definition exists of the social economy, solidarity economy, and social solidarity economy. However, discussions on these concepts provide similar backgrounds, definitions, and common principles and values for each one. In this part, it is aimed to present the historical and current meaning, core values, and principles of each concept. After discussions on three core concepts, the link between the SSE and women's co-operatives in this study will be demonstrated.

## **3.2 Background, Definitions, and Frameworks**

### **3.2.1 Social Economy**

The term of *social economy* is French in origin, and it aims to distinguish shared-value organizations carried out economic activities with social remits from public authorities and private enterprises (Smith, 2005, p. 276). Although the definition has emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a modern sense, its meaning has changed over time and dates back to corporations of humans over the centuries. Corporations and collective relief funds in the Egypt of the Pharaohs, religious brotherhood practices in the Greeks for the



funeral rituals, and craft guilds in the Roman Empire were the initial forms of human cooperation. During the Middle Ages, organizations in various forms such as brotherhoods, guilds, charities, associations, trade associations, emerged in different parts of the world in order to meet peoples' religious, economic, cultural, and daily needs. Over time, the social economy has been inspired and affected by various religious, cultural, and nationalist ideologies (Defourny & Develtere, 2009).

The social economy in its modern sense has appeared with the establishment of the first co-operative societies in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and became widespread across Europe throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the 1970s onwards, specific political and economic conditions have emerged for the expansion of the social economy across the globe. In the 1970s, the social economy reappeared as a third sector aiming to operate to fulfill needs not met by the public and private sectors (Defourny & Develtere, 2009). With the end of full employment and the welfare state (Amin et al., 2002) human needs majorly became out of the scope of social policy. Attempts to meet the needs and demands of the elderly, children, disabled individuals, youth, women, long-term unemployed people, former inmates, migrants, and refugees had become the core interest of the social economy. According to Ash Amin, the social economy of today is the commercial and non-commercial activities of the third sector and community organizations that meet social and environmental needs before the profit-maximization priority (2007, p. 4) In its current form, the social economy operates as the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector alternative to the public and private sectors in the market economy. Although some academics, consider its power to create alternative ways to capitalist market production (Amin, 2007; Wright, 2006), it became a widespread and well-known third sector, especially in Europe. Social enterprises in the UK occupy a large place in the social economy sector. The social economy has been supported within the framework of some institutions, such as the EU institutions, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), ILO, and operates within the market economy.

As of the 1970s, organizations following the 18<sup>th</sup> century tradition had been identified and characterized in European countries, such as France and Belgium. In the 1990s,

recognition and regulation processes of the social economy continued in the EU. In 2002, the EU defined social-economic institutions, which were identified as co-operatives, partner societies, associations, and foundations, as economic and social actors operating in all sectors at the European Standing Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations, and Foundations. In 2011, social enterprises were recognized as the social economy actors within the Social Business Initiative Communication, issued by European Commission (EC, 2021). Aside from EU countries, the agents of the social economy have become widespread with their visibility and recognition in the USA, Latin America, Asia, New Zealand, and Australia (Grigore, 2013). Aside from the EU, institutions, various international organizations and networks of the social economy, such as ILO, Social Economy Europe, and CIRIEC (International Center of Research and Information on the Public, Social and Co-operative Economy), have focused on the social economy at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 2009, social economy has been defined by ILO as “a concept designating enterprises and organizations, in particular co-operatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity” (ILO, 2009). More recently, the social economy definition which was introduced within the scope of the Action Plan of the EC highlights private entities, autonomous from public authorities, and specific legal forms. *Co-operatives, mutual benefit societies, associations (including charities), and foundations* have been identified as the four main social economy entities. In the action plan, social enterprises are also comprehended within the scope of social economy, as in previous frameworks (EC, 2021, p. 5).

In the common framework, shared principles and values driven by the social economy have been identified in the *Social Economy Charter*<sup>13</sup>. According to the Charter, the agents of the social economy share a commitment to pursue a set of common values

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<sup>13</sup> On 10 April 2002, the first version was promoted by CEP-CMAF (European Standing Conference of Co-operatives, Mutuals, Associations and Foundations). In 2015, the Charter was revised.

and principles: (a) solidarity, (b) civic participation, (c) individual and collective interest, (d) autonomous management, (e) social responsibility, (f) social cohesion/social inclusion, (g) economic democracy, (h) regional and local development.

Regarding the discussions and attempts to create a common framework, the social economy, in its modern sense aims to operate as the third sector based on the shared principles and values and to separate from both the public and private sectors to create solutions to unmet social and economic needs without challenging the market economy. Ideologically, the social economy is dominated by European perspectives and legal initiatives are defined in the social economy framework.

### **3.2.2 Solidarity Economy**

The concept of solidarity economy was identified at the first international meeting in 1997, Peru. A group of people expressed themselves as the citizens belonging to: “grassroots, farmers, natives, women, youth organizations; employers’ organizations; working communities; co-operatives, micro-enterprises associations; associations of the Church; Non Governmental Organizations; groups of environmentalists, associations of technologists; development networks; groups on social economy and a coalitions of 32 countries” (Poirier, 2014: p. 9).

Unlike the relatively long history of the social economy, the solidarity economy has developed independently in European and Latin American countries from the 1980s onwards. The pioneer academics were Luis Razeto in Chile and Jean Louis Laville in France (Kawano, 2018, p. 3). While the social economy came out as a way upon the collapse of the welfare state in the 1970s, the solidarity economy has developed with the crisis of neoliberal capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kawano, 2010) and premised a transformation in the economic, social, and political system (Kawano, 2018, p. 3). Whereas the solidarity economy has obviously a systemic, transformative, post-capitalist agenda, the social economy may or may not have a transformative, post-capitalist agenda (Poirier, 2014, p. 11). Although the social economy has

transformative potential for some academics such as Ash Amin and Eric O. Write, it doesn't challenge the system as an agreed argument. The solidarity economy is a process to challenge neoliberal capitalism, the harshness of the current social, economic, and political system. The fact that it is transformative rather than a reformist approach to the crisis reveals the desire for a systemic change with the many highlights of the transformative potential.

The solidarity economy has political, economic, and symbolic dimensions. Firstly, the solidarity economy urges the deliberation processes by active participation and representation. Secondly, it creates alternative economic practices by integrating democracy into the economic sphere. Thirdly, it has symbolic meaning in creating an alternative form to the capitalist system (Dacheux & Goujon, 2011, pp. 211-212). In particular, the symbolic meaning of the concept, its transformative power, and the alternative to capitalism is a remarkable distinction from the social economy.

The emphasis on the transformative framework, with the idea that the current economic system is not a natural phenomenon, is the most distinctive feature of the solidarity economy from other alternative economies, just like the social economy. Various studies on the challenging definition and theory of the solidarity economy refer to Karl Polanyi's work on the market economy. Polanyi, in *Great Transformation*, had analyzed the relationship between market and society from primitive societies to the 19<sup>th</sup> century society based on historical and anthropological studies and claimed that economic relations were embedded in society throughout history till the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He stated that “human society had become an accessory of the economic system” (Polanyi, ([1944,1957] 2001, p. 79) in the market society, unlike to previous societies where “man's economy, as a rule, was submerged in his social relationships” (2001, p. 48) and “the economic system was, in effect, a mere function of social organization” (2001, p. 52). In such a system where society lacked control over production and redistribution, fictitious commodities of production, as Polanyi argued, namely labor, land, and money expanded in the market economy through merely buying and selling form of the market organization. While market expansion has continued as one side of the movement, self-protection of society as a

countermovement has emerged as a reaction, which he called the “double movement” (2001, p. 136). In the analysis, Polanyi stressed the fact that the inevitable reaction for self-protection of society against the severe effects of the market economy was suppressed by laws and regulations after the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the planned *laissez-fair* market system (2001).

From a Polanian perspective, the solidarity economy can be considered as an inevitable transformative response of ordinary people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This framework is not an abstract notion within the theoretical framework because the premise of the practices of coping with the crisis is not a theory (Kawano, 2018, p. 3). The theory follows the practice and the solidarity economy comprise of a variety of practical forms by inevitable reactions of the people to survive. Different responses show that there is no universal, rigid model as Miller (2010) emphasized the solidarity economy is an open process and invitation (p. 26) rather than a single path or model to create an alternative economy. It is “not so much a model of economic organization as it is a process of economic organizing; it is not a vision, but an active process of collective visioning” (p. 28). While this pluralistic approach is quite challenging in defining the framework, grounded principles and values have been defined by the Solidarity Economy Association (n.d.). As it follows: (i) equal decision-making, (ii) active opposition to all forms of oppression, (iii) ecological sustainability, (iv) solidarity, (v) pluralism/fostering a variety of approaches “no single way”, (vi) system change. Such framework indicates three core grounds that differ from the social economy: *the ecological concern* that opposes the nature-human dichotomy; *celebration of pluralism* that rejects a single universal way; *recognition of all forms of oppression* aiming to demolish dominant power relations.

In the solidarity economy framework, democratizing the economy has become one of the critical steps of creating alternative economic organizing. As Jean Louis Laville argued that the market economy which was supported by the concern for individual freedom turned into a structure where inequalities were increased and the economy's submission to the political will with the claim of equality led to the suppression of freedom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The system has endangered democracy (Laville, 2013, p.

13). In order to challenge the growing inequalities and threaten democracy, the reintegration of democratic norms into economic life may open a space for practices to guarantee a pluralistic economy within a democratic framework (Laville, 2013, p. 8). The regulation of economic relations is possible with the democratization of the economy through the redistribution and reciprocity principles. In this framework, however, the solidarity economy does not necessarily aim at job creation, as Laville (2003) argues. In a different vision of economic organizing, for instance, the decommodification of community care and the voluntary provision of community care services can also apply to the scope of the solidarity economy. It is seen as an imaginary, transformative way to trigger collective visioning towards *another world*<sup>14</sup> at the heart of the crisis of neoliberal capitalism.

Another distinction from the social economy is that the solidarity economy is called a “movement of movements” (Miller, 2010, p. 26) and the practices exist both at the local and international levels (Laville, 2010). In addition, the solidarity economy has proposed many strategic alliances with various agents of the movements such as the issues on environment, women, workers, low-income, immigrants and refugees, and indigenous people. World Social Forum, Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) inclusive organizations are seen as critical and strategic alliances.

Considering the various approaches to creating a common framework, the solidarity economy is a new alternative collective visioning by challenging the universalistic approach, recognizing human-nature harmony, and surpassing all power relations, desiring transformative and systemic change as well. It straightforwardly refers to non-state and non-market practices moving away from the reformist structure of the social economy. Developing alliances can be considered critical for its transformative impact from the local to the global. Finally, it is a dynamic and pluralistic process based on the real needs and demands of the *ordinary people* that emerged in the practice, but not in the theory.

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<sup>14</sup> “Another world is possible” is the slogan of the World Social Forum.

### **3.2.3 Social Solidarity Economy**

The development of the SSE based on autonomous, independent, and collective organizations responding to the 21<sup>st</sup> century emerged to meet needs of people in times of crisis, with a similar departure to the solidarity economy, challenges the development approach. According to Peter Utting (2015), the failure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to establish order in the times of crisis, especially after the Great Depression and World Wars, was associated with growth-oriented development aiming at job creation under regulations of decent work, industrialization with the promotion of the consumption society, and welfare state model with implementing social policy and redistribution by the states. In this case, as Utting argues, such a growth-oriented development model resulted in jobless growth, devaluation of the unpaid female labor, women's double burden, triggering environmental issues, spatial inequalities throughout the urban areas, and financial crisis (Utting, 2015, pp. 7-9). These criticisms are fairly parallel to the feminist post-development approach. The development approach that emerged after the WWII resulted in enormous inequalities and prolonged crises, within and across the countries. With the multidimensional aspect and intersectionality of the crisis, women were the most affected groups in this process. While responding to this crisis, women have become prominent actors in the SSE. Indeed, with the great inequality-producing nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century crisis, women, displaced people, low-income, indigenous, peasants and so on have become agents in this movement through their urgent agendas.

Conceptually, the SSE is used as an overarching term to encompass the social economy and the solidarity economy. RIPESS states that they use the term the SSE in order to meet both the solidarity economy and the more radical consequences of the social economy (RIPESS, 2015, p. 10). In this study, by following a gradual social transformation agenda of the solidarity economy, the SSE is used based on the idea that the social economy is integrated into the capitalist system but operates for the benefit of those suffering from the system in this transformation.

The concept of the SSE refers to an umbrella term of social economy and solidarity economy. Although its definition, conceptualizations, and framework are blurry, it refers to democratically structured social and economic practices based on values and principles by diverse practices. These practices refer to structured legal entities defined in the social economy but also non-recognized entities. RIPESS, which is a global network of continental networks committed to the promotion of the SSE, identified its actors as co-operatives, fair and solidaristic trade, rural workers, community organizations, ecological producers, agroecology, commons, and solidarity economy networks (RIPESS, 2015, p. 7). Besides, core values are characterized as:(a) democracy, (b) solidarity, (c) inclusiveness, (d) subsidiarity, (e) diversity, (f) creativity, (g) sustainable development, (h) equality, equity and justice for all, (i) by respecting the integration of countries and people, (j) a plural and solidarity-based economy (RIPESS, n.d.). RIPESS's expressions on the SSE refer to a more comprehensive value system and more diversified organizational forms. Such an approach allows for considering broad coalitions under the solidarity ecosystems for sustainable and resilient communities. In this research solidarity economy refers to non-governmental structures that produce goods and services for social and economic purposes, based on the principles of democracy, participation, and solidarity.

In addition to the framework of RIPESS, international organizations and institutions such as ILO, UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE) have promoted the SSE and made efforts to raise its recognition and visibility. However, there is still no clear definition of the SSE yet. Until very recently, the SSE framework has been extensively identified in a report published by the ILO (2022). This report erodes the rigid distinction between social economy and solidarity economy, and the SSE refers to "social economy, third sector, social enterprise, the non-profit sector, solidarity economy, alternative economy and popular economy" (ILO, 2022, p. 11) as a new umbrella term, including different conceptualizations from different geographies. The values, principles, and agents of the SSE have been described from the ILO approach. The values of the SSE are (1) caring for people and the planet, (2) egalitarianism, (3) interdependency, (4) integrity, and (5) self-governance. Besides, the principles that operationalize the values are (1)



Social or public purpose, (2), Prohibition or limitation of profit distribution, (3) Democratic and participatory governance, (4) Voluntary cooperation, (5) autonomy and independence (ILO, 2022, p. 12-13). Lastly, the agents are (i) co-operatives, (ii) mutual society, (iii) association, (iv) foundations, (v) self-help groups, (vi) social enterprise (ILO, 2022, p. 13). In this latest work, the agents are recognized in a very broad sense. Traditional models, such as associations and foundations, are also included in this frame and it seems its focus is more concentrated on legal structures. RIPESS's (2015) highlight of different interpretations in the literature is considerable:

Thus the solidarity economy explicitly has a systemic, transformative, post-capitalist agenda. The social economy, on the other hand, refers to a sector of the economy that may or may not be a part of a transformative, postcapitalist agenda, depending on whom you're talking to. (RIPESS, 2015, p. 10)

It reminds us the challenging point of creating a common framework. After the recognition and visibility of the SSE have become the focus of ILO, OECD, and UN institutes, the concept has been identified within their framework. I believe such a framework emphasizes job creation and integration for those suffering from so-called vulnerable groups, thus, this approach has not been concerned with the overlapping potential through equity and transformative change. Therefore, in this study, the SSE has been referred beyond the conservative framework of international institutions, following the transformative potential of a solidarity economy. It is all kinds of collective initiatives based on solidarity from different sectors on a large scale, from local to global, compatible with shared principles and values, and not limited to legal initiatives. Following the distinct features of solidarity economy, the SSE builds broad coalitions and alliances with various movements “that range from the reassertion of indigenous cultural values and practices to those associated with so-called post-industrial society and social and environmental justice movements” (Utting, 2016, p. 118).

Regarding the promises of the SSE, it is critical to evaluate the constraints and potential of the SSE in a concrete framework without romanticizing it. Since the foundations on which it is based and the organizational form it idealizes, it may not be

feasible in all circumstances without a radical departure, considering the social system we live in. For instance; envisioned labor standards may not be easily viable and achievable.

Democratic governance may undermine the ability of these initiatives to make decisions and to take actions quickly. It may be difficult to find partners for investment as it is not for-profit. It may not be successful in competing with other for-profit enterprises (Utting, 2016, p. 119). Moreover, there is a risk that social concerns may undermine the goal of income-generating activities, mostly for co-operatives. Besides, women's lower formal education backgrounds than men's and the need for more women's voluntary labor in patriarchal societies may undermine the goal of gender equality in these structures (Utting, 2016, pp. 120-121). Nevertheless, in structures where women and men are organized together and women and men share leadership and managerial positions, the application of the values and ethical principles on which solidarity economies are based has the potential to enable gender-based equality. Beyond the gender dimension, adherence to democracy, participation, and inclusion principles should be the cornerstone of the model.

### **3.3 The SSE and Women's Co-operatives**

In the light of these discussions, the link between the SSE and women's co-operatives can be placed in this study. Focusing on women's co-operatives from the SSE framework has a thin line between the SSE and co-operative frameworks. Because the principles of co-operatives (ICO, 2016) do not contradict the SSE principles, this case could be studied within the co-operative principles. However, I endeavored to explore the potential of women's co-operatives as the SSE in terms of transformative agenda, pluralistic approach, integration of the various concerns, such as the environment, into the agenda and being a dynamic movement. In addition, the evaluation of women's co-operatives around the traditional co-operative framework may overlook by the transformative potential from the European and Western sense of gender perspective. The SSE framework, which advocates a variety of the approaches and ways against the single universal truth by following the post-development approach, will be more

feasible to study women's co-operatives in Turkey. This takes its source from a 21<sup>st</sup> century model that follows the idea that "people are deeply creative and capable of developing their own solutions to economic problems" (Miller, 2010, 28).

The SSE has a strong commitment and adherence to gender equality and women's empowerment. The statement released by RIPESS after the Manila Conference in 2013 stated that the invisible but active role of women is recognized, integration of the gender perspective into the SSE is imperative, and gender transformative is a key to the success of the SSE. "Gender is not just a women's issue, it is everyone's issue!" (RIPESS, 2013) is a statement of their adherence to gender perspective. In this respect, women's co-operatives meet the social, cultural, political, and economic needs of women through their organization by mobilizing their own resources at the local level, with a holistic approach to women's issues under the leadership of women.

In this study, I propose that the collective organization of ordinary women as victims of the system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The fact of them suffering from economic, social, cultural, or political conditions, is inspiring. I prefer to use the term *SSE* bearing on the gradual transformation to understand women's co-operatives as a step towards the transformation. Although these practices do not emerge with the aim of systemic change, they are a step towards transformation, empowering women and to a broader sense of transformation. To discuss this potential, I suggest three core topics: (i) women's empowerment and gender equality, (ii) democratization of work and employment, (iii) transformative agenda from the local. In the next part, I will discuss those topics based on the field research on women's co-operatives in Izmir.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **WOMEN'S CO-OPERATIVES IN IZMIR**

In this part, I will focus on the potential and limitations of women's co-operatives to empower women from the SSE framework based on the data obtained via field research. After evaluating the multidimensional empowerment of women, the more promising aspects of women's co-operatives from the SSE framework will be pointed out. Because women's co-operatives provide women's economic as well as social empowerment towards gender equality. I claim that they create viable and achievable alternatives through democratizing work and employment and put forward transformative agendas from the locals in the construction of an economic and social system far beyond the development paradigm. In the line with the variety of developments, I will discuss the different practices. Through the discussions, I believe that Table 1 would be facilitated to show the diverse profiles of the women's co-operatives and the interviewees with diverse practices and results.

**Table 1:** *The profiles of the women’s co-operatives and the interviewees*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Profile of the Women’s Coops</i>						<i>Profile of the Interviewees</i>		
	<i>Foundation year</i>	<i>Rural/Urban Area</i>	<i>Number of members</i>	<i>Active members and beneficiaries</i>	<i>Main economic activities</i>	<i>Non-economic activities</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education level</i>
Coop. 1	2019	Rural	36-37	15	agriculture , food production , handicrafts , knitted doll, recycling, cafe business	training , skill courses , advocacy works	chairperson/ founding member	58	bachelor
Coop. 2	2010	Urban	94	40-44	handicrafts , souvenirs, food production , cafe business	training , skill courses , trips, advocacy works	chairperson	58	high school
Coop. 3	2015	Urban	15	15	handicrafts , food production (borek, sarma, cakes etc.)	training	chairperson	31	bachelor
Coop. 4	2016	Rural	16	31	souvenirs, handicrafts , mesh bags, cafe-restaurant business	skill courses	chairperson/ founding member	52	high school
Coop. 5	2019	Rural	15	3-5	bread production	-	chairperson/ founding member	38	high school
Coop. 6	2015	Urban	100	100	handicrafts , sewing, knitting, jewelry	training , skill courses , trips, advocacy works	member	56	bachelor

**Table 1:** *The profiles of the women's co-operatives and the interviewees (cont'd)*

No.	Profile of the Women's Coops						Profile of the Interviewees		
	Foundation year	Rural/Urban Area	Number of members	Active members and beneficiaries	Main economic activities	Non-economic activities	Role	Age	Education level
Coop. 7	2020	Urban	19	19	food production (borek, sarma, cakes etc.)	-	chairperson/founding member	35	high school
							member	40	high school
							member	40	high school
Coop. 8	2016	Rural	80	80	handicrafts , textiles, jewelry, food production , restaurant business.	training , skill courses , trips, advocacy works	chairperson/founding member	42	high school
Coop. 9	2020	Urban	7	7	food production , cafe business	training	chairperson/founding member	35	elementary school
Coop. 10	2018	Urban	71	10	handicrafts , textiles, food production	training , skill courses	member	60	high school
Coop. 11	2020	Urban	13	13	fresh and processed mandarin	-	chairperson/founding member	60	high school
Coop. 12	2015	Rural	258	300	handicrafts , food production , textiles	training , trips	chairperson/founding member	42	bachelor
Coop. 13	2015	Urban	27	no information	agriculture and food production	-	chairperson/founding member	46	high school
Coop. 14	N/A	Urban	N/A	48	handicrafts and food production	training , skill courses	not officially established / candidate for founding membership	58	bachelor

**Table 1:** *The profiles of the women's co-operatives and the interviewees (cont'd)*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Profile of the Women's Coops</i>						<i>Profile of the Interviewees</i>		
	<i>Foundation year</i>	<i>Rural/Urban Area</i>	<i>Number of members</i>	<i>Active members and beneficiaries</i>	<i>Main economic activities</i>	<i>Non-economic activities</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education level</i>
Coop. 15	2020	Rural	7	7	agriculture and food production, textiles, silkworm breeding	training, skill courses,	chairperson/founding member	62	bachelor
Coop. 16	2011	Rural	46	10	handicraft, weaving	advocacy works,	chairperson	55	bachelor
Coop. 17	2019	Urban	14	14	stuffed mussels, food production (borek, sarma, cakes etc.)	community care	chairperson/founding member	35	elementary school
Coop. 18	2014	Rural	180	no information	handicrafts, textiles, bakery products, food production, cafe and beach business	training, skill courses, trips, advocacy works	member	56	high school
Coop. 19	2019	Rural	41	100	agriculture, handicrafts, souvenirs, textiles, food production	community care, training, skill courses, trips, advocacy works	chairperson/founding member	48	high school

## 4.1 Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

### 4.1.1 Economic Empowerment

The boosting role of women's co-operatives on women's empowerment and gender equality has been largely emphasized in the literature. Economic gain has a significant place as a way of empowerment in many parts of the world, such as *African countries* (COOP AFRICA, 2007), *Arab States* (Esim & Omeria, 2010), *Korea, Malaysia, India, Iran* (Kurimoto, n.d.), *Nicaragua* (Dilley, 2011), *Mexico* (Dawn 2212729 et al., 2016; Ferro-Medina, 2019), *Uganda* (Ferguson & Kepe, 2011), *Greece* (Koutsou et al., 2003), *Spain* (Gómez Carrasco, 2019), and *Turkey* (Emiroğlu, 2012; (Gümüšoğlu, 2012; Özdemir, 2013; Barut, 2017; Dalkıran, 2017; Özer-Topaloğlu & Topaloğlu, 2017; Kızıldağ & Karataş, 2018; Cinar et al., 2019; Kızıldağ, 2019). Income generation is a basic output of women's co-operative membership, just as with other forms of employment. However, working in a co-operative has an important role in the transition from the informal economy to the formal economy and from the subsistence economy to employment; access and control over the resources and services; increase income level (COOP AFRICA, 2007; Ryder, 2015; Azad 2017; Ferro-Medina, 2019).

Similar to the literature, I found supportive findings on women's economic empowerment through field research. However, there are differences among co-operatives in terms of income creation. All the women's co-operatives I interviewed (can be seen in Table 1) carry out economic activities. While economic activities are concentrated on food production, souvenirs, and textiles in the urban areas, agriculture, cafe-restaurant, and beach business are carried out in the rural areas in addition to activities in the urban Izmir. Activities in the urban area are more compatible with traditional women's roles. However, in addition to agricultural activities in rural areas, business administration seems to be a new field of activity for women's co-operatives. In this respect, it can be concluded that women who mobilize their local resources in rural areas develop creative solutions. For instance, a women's co-operative (Coop. 18) located by the sea carries out beach business. Another co-operative (Coop. 1) rents



their co-operative building and organizes ceremonies such as henna night and engagement for local people. Co-operative members earn income through those activities. Contrary to the home-based production finding of Özer-Topaloğlu and Topaloğlu (2017), I found that women work collectively in co-operative buildings or other product or service areas except for three co-operatives. In these two co-operatives, household-based production is a part of women, not all, but who produce handicrafts. This shows that women's co-operatives create an opportunity for women's participation in the public sphere. The third co-operative also states that beneficiary women sell their home-based food products in the village market which was established by cooperation between women's co-operatives and local governments. Thus, home-based production becomes a tool for increasing income for some women who do not work in the village.

One of the key reasons for women to participate the co-operative is to earn money. Some respondents also indicated their economic motivation is the reason to join co-operative. One interviewee stated that she became a member of the co-operative during the period she was unemployed (Coop. 6), while another interviewee also became a member to work (Coop. 10). Furthermore, as respondents noted, co-operative members have economic expectations. Considering the level of income, women's co-operatives believed that the amount of income was insufficient for women's empowerment (Coop. 16). As I searched, most women, work irregularly, unregistered, and without social insurance. According to the research, only a tiny percentage of women work with social insurance, and the vast majority of women consider their earnings as *additional income*. On the other hand, a representative, who expressed an opinion that the income of women should not be underestimated, stated that "They also earned money; those who paid their debts, bought bracelets, bought a mobile phone and connected to the Internet. Those who bought their own car with their earnings" (Coop. 19). With the income generation, women who have never had a vacation in their lives are now able to do so (Coop. 8). The opportunity for women, whose spouses are in prison or who are single mothers in single-income households, work with regular income and social security insurance. This is the most essential contribution for the most vulnerable women in my interpretation. Solidarity among

women to support most vulnerable groups is also based on consensus inside the co-operative. As a result, some women can take up the role of breadwinner at home through co-operatives (Coop. 18).

Women are often paid daily or hourly wages based on the minimum wage. Yet, a co-operative (Coop. 8) has developed a different wage valuation model. They have "kitchen teams" from women members. Each team runs the cafe business weekly. At the end of the week, after giving the co-operative share (10%), they share the income equally among themselves. Each team was said to earn around the monthly minimum wage in a week. The developed models can be inspiring for other women's co-operatives. Other interviewees, for example, point to a co-operative that offers higher wages for members (Coop. 18) as an inspiration model. When they have the financial capability, they are eager to negotiate comparable high pay scales. Co-operatives are unable to provide high wages with security insurance because they are generally established with low capital, and some are not yet sustainable businesses.

Given this knowledge, some co-operatives may be able to provide regular income to their members. Women's co-operatives are the only option for women excluded from the labor market, lack sufficient skills and education to work elsewhere, and cannot work in the same workplace with men due to patriarchal oppression. Additionally, women's co-operatives might be considered as an option for women who are unable to work long hours due to traditional gender roles such as household care. Lastly, it would not be a feasible comparison between women's co-operatives and for-profit businesses, and most importantly women's co-operatives should not be confused with market-oriented economic organizations such as women's entrepreneurship.

In terms of providing social security insurance, regular income, and a relatively high wage level, I found that some women's co-operatives are more effective in rural areas. Although no comparison can be made in terms of typology, the differences can be highlighted. Grassroots women's co-operatives are very innovative and capable of developing their own solutions to economic empowerment with almost no external assistance, whereas political project co-operatives receive more support and assistance

from public institutions and bodies. Except for specializations such as engineering, women are often paid at the same level for the different tasks. Nevertheless, the profit margin of co-operatives in the service sector or co-operatives that export increased resulting in regular income and social security insurance for more women.

#### **4.1.2 Social and Psychological Empowerment**

In the SSE framework, as Laville (2003) argues, it does not necessarily aim at job creation. Co-operatives can provide different types of benefits to their members. Social and psychological empowerment is another way of women's empowerment in women's co-operatives, and it is the most frequently highlights after economic empowerment in the literature: the improvements of women's social status in the household and community (Ferguson & Kepe, 2011; Gümüšoğlu, 2012), access to resources, technology, and infrastructure (Azad, 2017), taking collective actions and leadership role (Esim & Omeria, 2010; Ferguson & Kepe, 2011; Ferro-Medina, 2019), and psychological support (Varol, 2013; Cinar et al., 2019). In the line with literature, I found that women's co-operatives carry out some major non-economic activities (can be seen in the Table 1) as a way of social empowerment. 15 out of 19 co-operatives carry out non-economic activities, such as training, skill courses, trips and advocacy works. Some organize events such as fairs and festivals. Although these activities vary among co-operatives, they are basically shaped according to the needs and demands of women and local conditions.

Co-operatives support women by various trainings and skill courses. For instance, members engaged in food production support their members in this field with hygiene training, creating standard recipes, and cooking workshops for pastry, and seafood. Women have the opportunity to turn their traditional work into professional work, and they acquire a profession. Also, sewing, knitting, and handicraft courses enable them to participate in the production. Furthermore, they support women's empowerment by providing foreign language, CV creating, and gardening courses as well as teaching them how to use computers and smartphones. The opportunity of interacting with technology is really valuable, especially for the elderly. As one interviewee stated:

"After women bought smartphones with their earnings, we taught them to use it by opening courses. We reaped the benefits especially during the pandemic period, we communicated with elderly through WhatsApp groups" (Coop. 19). As Azad (2017) founded similar finding in the Asia Pasific Region that women's access to technology has been supported in co-operative organizations. Moreover, they open courses on awareness-raising, women's human rights, and women's rights. These trainings significant in terms of its potential to politicized women's identity in the co-operative. With these various training, women are supported to acquire new skills in daily life aside from co-operative activities. Such opportunities for women are directly related to the social purpose of the co-operative.

Another aspect of women's social and psychological empowerment is their "success" journey. This study has shown that women are generally not encouraged and supported in the co-operative establishment process, particularly by families, relatives, and locals. There are two reasons for this: they are women, and they are attempting to establish a co-operative. One of the newly established co-operative representative stated that:

They are still waiting with hope that this co-operative will be closed, that this will not work. ... Women say it and men say it too. Men consider us as hopeless cases. According to them, women will gather there to drink tea and coffee (in the co-operative). (Coop. 11)

Other women from the neighborhood formed by internal migration in the poor areas of the province told about their feelings:

When you live in a small place and you have already made a decision, its energy is felt, everyone is gossiping. It says that the co-operative has not been opened for six months after all (due to the pandemic). After this point, and after this negative synergy, it is not possible to turn it into a positive one. Because here is a small place. (Coop17)

Women's co-operatives have also faced prejudice due to the inactive status and unsuccessful stories of the agricultural development co-operatives, which have a long history in Turkey, and even the bad image of the building co-operatives. The interviewee from Coop.13 explains how the failure of other cooperatives turned into

prejudices on women's cooperatives: "An agricultural development co-operative was established here, 35-40 years ago. It was an inactive and very problematic co-operative. ... That is, the views on women's co-operatives are always due to the bad examples there". The stigmatizations went further and reached the point of "raising terrorists" in the first years of the co-operative's establishment, as Coop. 13 had experienced.

In the process of establishing co-operatives, women had to struggle not only with financial problems but also with prejudices against themselves and co-operatives. Over time, they have erased such prejudices with the visibility of their achievements at the local level.

Peoples' perspective on our women has changed. The pressures have also decreased, even if it is partially. As we become stronger and grow, we will get rid of the pressures completely. Since socialization affects our women positively, the perspective towards women's co-operatives has changed positively. (Coop. 17)

In this process, I believe that women's solidarity and collective effort towards a common goal stimulates and strengthens them both socially and psychologically. Women's leadership roles have been uncovered through the co-operative management. Women's co-operatives provide a significant opportunity to support women's leadership in comparison with the mixed co-operatives, where the gender inequality issues in leadership, management, and decision-making processes are privileged (Esim & Omeria, 2010; Ganem-Cuenca, 2011) and international organizations' effort to promote women's activity in a leadership role (COOP AFRICA, 2007; Esim & Omeria, 2010).

In the Izmir case, it is seen that the leadership role empowers women. With similar findings in Mexico (Ferguson & Kepe, 2011), women not only manage the co-operatives but also become community leaders in some co-operatives. Practices such as necessary assessment of the local people and reporting them to the public institutions (Coop. 17), providing communication and cooperation in the village (Coop. 19) during the pandemic period are promising to build more resilience and

sustainable community. The leadership of women in co-operatives also serves the public interest and women take responsibility for mobilizing local resources.

The vast majority of interviews showed that women's co-operatives are necessary in order to avoid dealing with men and falling behind men's leadership:

Where there is a man... A man comes up with the logic that I will manage once. I mean, none of the men can put up with taking direction from you even if you are more educated than him. I experienced that too while working in the private sector. ... My daughter had the same problem. I mean, not having a man (in the co-operative) is an advantage. In other words, even if a man cannot do anything, he sees himself superior because of his masculinity. (Coop. 14)

If men join in, women would fall behind. ... Men would certainly leave women in the behind in the administration. Because that's also how it is in politics. (Coop. 15)

Despite the claim in the literature that women's co-operatives are sexist structures by examining the articles of association (Kurtege-Sefer, 2020, p. 120), the field research obviously does not support this claim. Although the reasons and justifications vary, the vast majority of the interviewees agree upon the idea that women's co-operatives are not sexist structures. The most common argument that women's co-operatives are not sexist is that, as a female-only organization, women's co-operatives play a facilitating role in women's participation in social and business life due to the patriarchal structure. An interviewee stated that the members could not come if they were the mixed co-operative, women could not bring their children, and their husbands allow them to work only because everyone was a woman (Coop. 10). Far beyond the leadership issue, the female-only co-operative has facilitated the women's joining in the co-operative in some cases. This claim is not limited to the women's co-operatives in Turkey but also in Korea, Malaysia, India, Iran, women's co-operatives facilitate taking part in co-operative structure due to religious norms restricting women and to avoid male dominance in mixed organizations and promote feminist action (Kurimoto, n.d.).

The social and psychological empowerment of women is supported in all types of co-operatives, but the degree may vary. I suggest that empowerment degree increase with

the more solidarity among women, thanks to interaction within co-operative members and external environment, leadership roles, advocacy work, engagement in decision making and policymaking mechanisms/processes, more economic and non-economic activities, and networking.

#### **4.1.3 Political Empowerment**

The last point is that women's co-operatives promote political empowerment. In the literature some cases from Africa and Mexico highlight the political participation of women (COOP AFRICA, 2007) and cooperation with the community, municipal authorities, male households, and NGOs (Ferro-Medina, 2019). However, in the Turkey case, there is no explanatory clue how co-operatives empower, even some studies (Varol, 2013; Cinar et al., 2019) point out women's political empowerment. However, I found some points in the field research.

First of all, a new organizational model for Turkey, which was founded based on women's own needs and demands, was a political breakthrough for the "ordinary women". Like other SSE actors, the establishment of women's co-operatives follows the core idea that "people are deeply creative and capable of developing their own solutions to economic problems" (Miller, 2010, 28). Although there are women from various backgrounds, it is fundamentally an organization of low-income and poor women (Ozdemir, 2013). Even though this model has been used as a tool for women's work with local authorities, need-based co-operatives are still being operating and continue to establish. It is obvious that women put their own needs on the political agenda and mobilizing local resources to empower women.

Women's co-operatives support the act of building up female identity. During the interviews, female identity was always forefront in their speeches, and I mostly feel that women attribute their success to being female-only and/or women-led co-operative. Even though I did not interview with the female-only agricultural co-operatives, some interviewees suggested interviewing with those, as well. Interviewees are calling them "women's co-operative". I did not interview those co-

operatives which were not established in the women's co-operative type because women in traditional co-operative structures such as the agricultural type were not the focus of this study. As mentioned above, they provide training on women's issues and Coop. 1 stated that they were involved in the local women's movement. Besides, they emphasized the female identity to demand positive discrimination through their advocacy activities. Only one interviewee opposed the positive discrimination idea. They politicize their demands and needs by recognizing them through the female identity.

Women transform the female identity into a collective identity within the co-operative. Women take an activist role in women's co-operatives called as a movement by themselves (FSWW, 2005; 2008). The fact that the women's co-operative in Turkey is called a movement and women's activist role emphasized by women is a clear evidence that this model has a transformative role. Because women are not passive members of co-operatives, they fight not only for themselves but also for other women, act with cooperation and solidarity with other women's co-operatives, and make collective legal demands<sup>15</sup> for the improvement of their organizational capacities and sustainability. Women's co-operatives also increase women's power to influence political decisions on women's issues<sup>16</sup>.

In their relationship with the external environment, women become a part of the local and sometimes wider networks. Although the relationship between local and some women's co-operatives raises the problem of autonomy and independence, some seem to have developed collaborations based on principles. Regarding the NGOs, FSWW

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<sup>15</sup> Women's Co-operatives Call for Tax Exemption to the Parliament (Kadın Kooperatifleri Meclise Vergi Muafiyeti Çağrısı Yapıyor), Retrieved from <https://www.sivilsayfalar.org/2021/10/18/kadin-kooperatifleri-meclise-vergi-muafiyeti-cagrisi-yapiyor/>

Women's Co-operatives Call for Support Against 'COVID-19 Damage' (Kadın Kooperatiflerinden 'COVID-19 Hasarı'na Karşı Destek Çağrısı), Retrieved from <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplumsal-cinsiyet/222166-kadin-kooperatiflerinden-covid-19-hasari-na-karsi-destek-cagrisi>

<sup>16</sup> Simurg Women's Co-operatives Union declared a statement protesting Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNFA7NrLvHZ/>



stands out as the most active and important actor in relations and partnerships with NGOs in the region. FSWW supports women's co-operatives in terms of sharing legal information, training, consultancy, and exchange of knowledge and experience. In addition to FSWW, Association for Supporting Contemporary Life (ÇYDD), Volunteer Work Platform, and the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA) were also counted among the organizations that cooperated with social concerns, especially in education and the environment. Lastly, many women's co-operatives have developed various relations, activities, and collaborations with the Aegean Women's Platform, which includes not only women's co-operatives but also other women's associations.

An analysis of the interconnections between women's co-operatives demonstrates that, while official union membership is limited, they are a part of a much larger unofficial solidarity network that spans the province. Owing to WhatsApp channels and periodic coordination meetings, women co-operatives can act in solidarity. Women's co-operatives demonstrate this solidarity and close relationship:

Of course, we have communication with other co-operatives. ... I am constantly following who is doing what, all across Turkey, in the Aegean. It strengthens us, of course. We are informed about what they are doing or when they have a problem, they look for solutions, we support each other, we produce solutions. ... I observed that there are co-operatives together and sharing information, trying to overcome each other's deficiencies, and I think these are useful. (Coop. 6)

It is apparent that women's co-operatives are not competing with one another, but rather working together to build communication networks. Women's co-operatives are also involved in collaborative economic attempts such as purchasing products and co-production. Some interviewees mention comparable relationships with other producer and agricultural development co-operatives in their localities, particularly in rural areas.

In terms of differentiation between co-operatives, it can be argued that more non-economic activities, such as awareness, consciousness-raising and advocacy, foster and support women's political empowerment. Besides, grassroots women's

organizations are more promising, as the purpose of their establishment is political. On the one hand, the political empowerment of women is related to the social empowerment vision of the co-operative, on the other hand, networking directly and indirectly contributes to women's political empowerment. Multidimensional empowerment is not a linear process, each form of empowerment is an ongoing process that supports each other.

Women's co-operatives are regarded to support and foster economic, social, psychological, and political empowerment. I argue that the three dimensions of women's empowerment through women's co-operatives lead to a discussion of the SSE's transformative potential. The role of women's co-operatives provides a step towards gender equality.

#### **4.2 Democratization of Work and Employment**

The most distinctive feature of women's co-operatives, which was defined as the SSE actors in this study, from for-profit businesses is an alternative economic organization. Articulating democratic values into work is a primarily feasible but sometimes limited and alternative organizational management way. In order to understand the potential, I will focus on women's co-operatives' experiences in production and redistribution relations, participatory processes, democratic management, and governance based on solidarity.

There is no doubt that equality in production and redistribution is the most common principle for all women's co-operatives. All interviewees constantly underlined this principle, and it seems one of the major differences between for-profit businesses. It is understood that this principle works in two ways in co-operatives: There is no wage difference between the members. The more you work, the more you earn.

During the interviews, a co-operative representative who made a statement about equal pay summarized the vision for a new economy. She wanted me to imagine two women making manti:

If one of them makes three kilos of manti in an hour and the other makes one kilo, a standard should be set here. We can say that we will make two kilos of manti per hour. But here, we cannot pay differently for more talented woman who made three kilos. Those who know-well will teach those who do not know. (Coop. 18)

This approach prevents women from competing with each other. Solidarity in production empowers women in other fields as well. However, it is stated that if the member is doing something that requires professional training or skills, such as food engineering, the fee may be higher, which is paid within a standard.

In women's own evaluation, the distinguishing features between the professional business and women's co-operative are solidarity, equality, and fair distribution:

The more you produce, the more you earn. (Coop. 9)

The co-operative event is something else different, it is an event that brings women's solidarity to the agenda. (Coop. 11)

We are employee-owner in the workplace. The more shares you have, the stronger you are. But everyone is equal in co-operatives. (Coop. 17)

With these particular statements of women on production relations, almost all co-operatives have promoted collective production, with a few exceptions in knitting work in two co-operatives. Collective production is an action that enables the strengthening of solidarity, women's identity, and co-operative belonging. It also allows women to exist in their collective sphere, outside the home. Together they can discuss their common problems and needs, find solutions, and just share their own feelings. Collective work creates stronger women. A representative stated that "The more shares you have, the stronger you are" (Coop. 17) parallel to the women's experience in Greece (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 2).

The democratic governance process proposes more participatory ways in the SSE framework rather than co-operatives. In the co-operative structure, members elect the Board of Directors and the Supervisory Board at the General Assembly annually. Important decisions are presented to all members and voted on. Each member has one

vote. Although co-operatives are considered democratic structures, more participatory and consensus base practices can promote democracy at work.

In this study, I found that women's co-operatives have developed alternative methods and mechanisms to extend the members' participation in the co-operative management process. In addition, this effort to create a participatory process has the potential to promote participatory citizenship in a broader sense with the representation of public and local governmental bodies, or networks and coalitions.

Establishing working groups for each field of activity or working venues has been another way to provide direct operational convenience in the co-operatives. Women have also made easier to determine the operation and principles in a pluralistic and democratic way. While one of the women's co-operatives that made this application mentioned only economy-oriented working groups, the other pointed to working groups that cover all of the co-operative activities such as projects, communication, and social media, art, etc.

WhatsApp is the most common communication medium for members and a participative means. It has been reported that the use of WhatsApp has made it simpler for members to share ideas, discussions, information and decisions sharing. In this way, it is understood that better participation of the members is also ensured:

We write on our WhatsApp group saying that “There is such a problem, what are your suggestions about it, how can we solve it?”, and there are suggestions. ... WhatsApp is also a facilitator for us in this regard. (Coop. 8)

This is a small place with a thousand inhabitants. We keep in touch, so when something is done today, there is a group (WhatsApp), I share it on the group. When we make a decision, I share it on the group, so all members are informed of it. (Coop. 13)

All members have been always informed of everything. That is why we were re-elected. ... We write (message) every decision through WhatsApp. (Coop. 12)

We have a group (WhatsApp), I'm writing so that we can meet tomorrow. Everyone curious comes up and those who are not curious do not. But we talk on the group, they get news, we don't do anything alone. (Coop. 4)

When I came back to the co-operative after every meeting I attended, I tried to provide feedback to everyone who was there, as it happened today, in order to motivate and inform them as well. I believe this, there needs to be feedback. (Coop. 6)

With these particular statements of women, WhatsApp groups are important means to communicate with the members. Whether it is a co-operative with few or a large number of members, all kinds of issues, such as voting, asking members ideas, information, solve problems or son may be provided via WhatsApp communication channel. No other means has been found as functioning as WhatsApp. Additionally, open meetings and agency-based meeting are increasing the participation of other women. Participatory processes were ensured beyond the limited participation in democratic processes with a right to vote.

The last point is the women's knowledge degree on co-operative. Interestingly, the vast majority of interviewees had a great knowledge of co-operative structure and principles, as well as horizontal leadership. Many of them highlighted the principles of co-operatives when giving examples or explaining the subject. Some also stated that they took training on co-operative establishment and management, leadership from the FSWW, consultants, university or educational co-operatives. Some interviewers said that the elders of the family were also members of the co-operatives in the village, and they had been familiar with the co-operative structure for many years. It is clear that knowing the co-operative structure from the past, but most importantly, training supports the collective and horizontal leadership of women in the co-operative organization. These clues reveal the importance of informal education on co-operatives to create more democratic workplace. Not limited to co-operative establishment and management, but also informal educations on women's issues, technology, or any skill development course can change towards gender equality and beyond.

Compared to rural and urban women's co-operatives, the most promising models to create more participatory processes on management and governance have been created by the rural co-operatives. According to the interviewees, the culture of joint work (imece), co-production, and solidarity are still prevalent in rural regions, making it

much easier for women to manage co-operatives by implementing participatory processes. In urban areas, the exchange of leadership and management among members can sometimes be challenging. Some chairpeople also expressed their loneliness in management processes. Women's co-operatives in urban areas need to develop their own methods to apply democratic principles, or at least adapt rural participatory methods to urban contexts.

Furthermore, when women's co-operatives support their members with non-economic activities such as co-operatives and leadership education, non-business trips, and events aimed at connecting members, democratic principles become more easily articulated in work and employment. Bearing in mind that democratization is a process to transform the approaches to work and employment, members should be often supported with non-economic activities.

In terms of democratic management and governance processes, an interesting finding relates to the establishment types of co-operatives. Women's co-operatives established by grassroots women predictably adhere to democratic principles. I found that co-operatives established by women's groups with common needs and purposes are more likely to be managed with democratic principles in the forthcoming years of the establishment. In co-operatives established under the leadership of one woman-led, the organization and creation of participatory processes for women is quite challenging. Because the purpose of women's co-operatives could not be fully understood by local women and co-operatives are seen as for-profit enterprises more. But interestingly, co-operatives established as a political project before 2019 also tend to adhere to democratic values and principles. There is a great difference between the "political project" co-operatives established before 2019 and those after 2019. Co-operatives established before 2019 support the purpose of co-operatives as common structures by supporting their members with non-economic activities. The women interviewed in these types of co-operatives generally have political party backgrounds and take part in women's issues. Some women have been or are still active in civil society. These reasons often result in the adoption of democratic values, even if they started as a political project in the establishment period. However, co-operatives that

were established as political projects after 2019 often fail to embrace democratic values.

Although no significant disparities in democratic organization work have been identified among sectors, some insights may be made. It cannot always be easy to implement democratic governance processes when women interact less with each other in sewing and knitting works, and teams work separately from one another. This is just because the interviews show that democratizing work and employment is an ongoing process. Although the commitment to democratic principles and values has been emphasized, this is an unusual system for us. Women also learn this kind of work in a process. For this reason, each experience, such as polling or voting via WhatsApp or trying more fair methods in the valuation of wages, is remarkably valuable. They provide us with promising aspects of alternative work and employment by creating peoples' own solutions outside the standards and values of the capitalist labor market.

### **4.3 Transformative Agenda from Local**

In this study, the transformative agenda of women's co-operatives in their locales within the framework of the SSE has been determined. I propose the transformative agenda of women's co-operatives as the potential of networking, influencing public policy, and bringing a new vision to local development. Besides, I suggest that their transformative agenda may affect the international movement through the integration of wider networks.

Although women's co-operatives are supported by networks, these networks may not be defined as networks across the globe. These networks provide training, improvements on their practices, and increase their visibility beyond the local area (RIPESS, 2021). The case of women's co-operatives in Izmir also encountered formal or informal networks. The main actors in their networks are: women's co-operatives, Simurg Women's Co-operatives Union, FSWW, women's NGOs, other types of NGOs, municipalities and different types of co-operatives such as consumption and agricultural development. Thanks to Women's Co-operatives Coordination which is

an informal network, operating in Izmir since 2014, all co-operatives in the province come together at meetings and communicate via WhatsApp group.

Simurg Women's Co-operatives Union has been frequently referred by member co-operatives. For the work of the Union has been run under the facilitation of FSWW (Coop. 8), they state that they have been more active, strengthened their institutional capacity, and become more participatory since the last year (Coop. 6). Although it is emphasized that Simurg Union's institutional capacity has not developed yet and it has few members, it is thought that unions are important actors for the co-operatives. The Union has the potential to become an important actor in overcoming its problems through its negotiation and advocacy process with public institutions. It may also play a role in engaging with similar women's co-operatives abroad and meeting with the other SSE networks.

Collaboration with the other actors of the SSE is one of the key principles. Just as the SSE (Utting, 2016), women's co-operatives are open to build broad coalitions and alliances with various movements. Their distinctive features and long-term success from the other co-operative models in Turkey may be provided by local to global coalitions and alliances. In this study, women's co-operatives, which are a relatively new alternative organization model, have succeeded in creating a network(s) with the other SSE actors and non-actors since the beginning of the 2000s. I refer to the network, but there are many small networks of co-operatives within their local conditions, but the actor and relationships are similar.

As yet, women have developed networks at local, regional, and national levels. Regarding the relationships with international peers, although there is interest and curiosity about women's co-operatives in the world, very few interviewees stated that they follow their peers around the world or have had the opportunity to listen to their experiences before. This opportunity to meet was only possible with the exchange meetings organized by FSWW and Simurg Union. The connections with global networks with new alternative actors will also ensure the recognition and increase the visibility of women co-operatives.



In the public policy framework, I believe that women's co-operatives have the potential to draw the attention of public institutions to women's co-operatives from the focus of employment to the focus of social policy through creating participatory mechanisms and agent transfer. On this topic, there is a literature gap, and I could not reach any findings. The basis on the field research, I propose the main findings on the issue. Firstly, women's co-operatives have formed communication channels with the public institutions. These relations can be promoted to strengthen both sides. In the current situation, either women's co-operatives receive space or sales support to continue their activities, or public institutions instrumentalize women's co-operatives for women's empowerment and employment goals. Women's co-operatives meet their demands as passive actors.

Public institutions also support the establishment of co-operatives to achieve their targets. This situation can be improved, but I believe that existing co-operatives should be strengthened rather than establishing new co-operatives.

Public institutions, especially local governments, can support women's co-operatives because they include vulnerable groups which public institutions cannot excessively reach, perhaps with a quota to include them. Sustainable support and non-hierarchical relations may be transformative in the public policymaking and promoting processes. At the same time, women's co-operatives can support public works in terms of assessing needs, reaching people in need, and directing official support mechanisms. Also, women's co-operatives develop suitable business models for community care, or may operate more in the care sector. Such a collaboration model could solve many problems, and also be inspiring for the other SSE agents around the world.

Lastly, I found that women's co-operatives practise different local developments with pluralist approach aiming to democracy, social inclusion, community care interest, ecological concern towards more just, equal and sustainable communities. In the literature, the contribution of women co-operatives in development have been emphasized (Özdemir, 2013; Barut 2017) and macro-level development (COOP

AFRICA, 2007) also highlights it as a long-term effect. Although there are emphases, the literature on women's co-operatives in Turkey does not provide information on how it contributes to development. Both the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study trigger to understand the pluralistic practices leading to local development. In this study, some points leading to alternative developments that follow the SSE framework will be stressed. I argue that women's co-operatives, especially in rural areas, have a great potential to contribute to local development. This potential differs amongst women's co-operatives in the SSE framework. At first, women's co-operatives promote different local development approaches, and I suggest that such approaches have been imagined in the scope of the local context with similarities between them.

Integrating the democracy vision into local development takes place through the co-operative's relations with the beneficiaries, especially with the members of the co-operative, and with the local external environment. For instance, a co-operative that operates with democratization of work will serve more participatory citizens beyond the limited co-operative practices.

In addition, women's co-operatives serve to social inclusion in the community. In the story of a co-operative established in the rural area of Izmir, women pioneered the establishment of co-operatives in order to turn the food and non-food products traditionally produced by women into economic value, to encourage agricultural production, and not to feel left behind of the villagers from the newcomers who were well-educated and well-skilled people.

We were established for the development of rural women in our region. We gathered together (with women). First of all, what women can do, if aunts can make booties or vests? If they're making sarma, dolma, or borek? If they work in the field of agriculture? We gathered so that they could grow whatever they would plant in the field. Then we split up into units. Agriculture unit, natural food unit, design-souvenir unit... We have appointed a responsible person at the head of each unit. These people are volunteers, of course. They organized the unit by themselves, they formed their own group. Of course, under the roof of the co-operative. We willed them to appreciate their efforts, earn money and stand on their own legs. Let them feel the assurance of this and socialize with the newcomers to the village. Because only a few village women stayed here (many people immigrated). The people, who are the

newcomers, are well-educated and well-skilled people... Honestly, we did not want the village women to be incomplete. (Coop. 19)

The mentioned practice is quite inspirational in terms of explaining the transformative role of the co-operative at the local level. In terms of social inclusion, women's co-operatives develop fair opportunities between the educated and the uneducated, the villagers and the newcomers. In addition, co-operatives ensure the social inclusion of the vulnerable through the multidimensional empowerment of women who are divorced, head of single-income households, and whose spouses are convicts.

There are also practices connecting and strengthening the community ties with the reference to the pandemic period. They supported the elderly and the poor in the countryside with food and hygiene items so that they could stay healthy and safe at home. In addition, a co-operative established in a poor neighborhood made it easier for the local people to benefit from incentives and aid by identifying needs in the neighborhood during the early stages of the pandemic. In addition, young women in the co-operative facilitated local government activities by working with the municipality and neighborhood representatives.

Lastly, ecological concern was emphasized by some interviewees. Even though a small number of women's co-operatives intent to ecological-friendly production, it is seen to increase gradually in co-operatives business plans to respond to ecological crisis are promising. One of the aims of the establishment of the co-operative, which is to evaluate the discarded fruits in their regions, has taken a step to fully implement the zero-waste principle, and they state that they will work towards this goal soon. Although the zero-waste target is not yet in all business areas, a waste prevention policy is followed in another co-operative by making flour from the kernels and shells of the products in food production. There are also women's co-operatives that produce recycled products.

In the light of all these practices, women's co-operatives have practiced alternative local development approaches based on their own agenda on the principles and values

compatible with the SSE framework. With the increase in adherence to the framework, women's co-operative contribution to local development will increase. The transformative agendas of women's co-operatives that rise from the local to the global are promising.

In terms of local transformative agendas, I assumed it was inappropriate to discuss whether certain types of women's co-operatives were more successful or promising. Because the issue of the transformative agendas from the local is in itself proposed multiple approaches, different experiences, and pluralism. Nevertheless, different motivations and practices among co-operatives still remain.

Compared to rural and urban women's co-operatives, the rural co-operatives are networking more with agricultural development co-operatives in their regions and consumer co-operatives in the urban areas. Rural co-operatives mostly operate in agricultural production and food production. With these types of co-operatives, their relations concentrated on marketing, supply of raw materials, or common agenda of the rural area. Local public institutions and village associations are the most common actors in their networks. In urban areas, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations, public and private sector actors are common actors in the women's co-operatives' networks. These are not opposing actors. Often all these actors interact within the provincial network. However, these are the primary relationship types in the network development process.

In terms of establishment types, it can be argued that co-operatives established from the grassroots and established as political projects before 2019 are more likely to form or be included in networks due to their approach. However, in one-woman-led co-operatives, women are very active in networks as they are very willing and enthusiastic to learn from each other. Besides, women are included in networks with solidarity motivation in political project co-operatives established after 2019.

In the process of influencing public policies, I cannot suggest a sharp distinction in rural/urban, inter-sectoral, typology, the field of activity, or so on. However, I can

suggest that networking capabilities also allow us to consider women's co-operatives as a movement with fosters women's transformation into political actors. Even though the constituency of women in networks varies regarding to many purposes and motivations, the power to influence public policies is realized through these networks. For this reason, it seems that more women's co-operatives in the network negotiation will more likely increase their advocacy capacity. It is crucial to underline that the ratio of the proportion of petition signatories in the advocacy work which was carried out by women's co-operatives throughout Turkey could not be underestimated. The fact that women are able to carry their own agenda to the public sphere through advocacy works is evidence of their strength, even though the political interests threaten the operation of women's co-operatives with the values and principles.

While rural co-operatives bring new insights to development, such as social inclusion and supporting rural development, urban co-operatives serve to reduce urban poverty and provide employment for the most vulnerable groups. Besides, women's co-operatives allow women to bargain with patriarchal oppression and empower them in the public sphere in rural areas.

#### **4.4 The Key Issues and Problems of Women's Co-operatives**

All of the interviewees believe that women's co-operatives are the most suitable model and they do not need another business model to be successful. However, they stated that in order to be successful, they need solutions to their problems. Women's co-operatives have faced common problems in legislative framework, co-operative management and governance, sustainable business model development and financial difficulty.

One of the most fundamental problems of women's co-operatives is the legislative issues. Lacking a common framework creates a challenging situation, just like the solidarity economy and the SSE. Women indicated that women's co-operatives needed a common legal ground for their status as there was no clear recognition in the legal framework. The legal regulations of women's co-operatives have been identified under

the Co-operatives Law and the Turkish Commercial Code. Current legislation and regulations do not meet women's needs. It was emphasized that several meetings were held with the Ministries. Yet, there have not been any solutions. Although member cooperatives of Simurg Women's Co-operatives Union have active advocacy work on this issue with many reports, remains one of the key obstacles. Some mentioned demands include changes in the tax law, the inclusion of members in the scope of social security, facilitating their work in the field of care services, grants, and funds for women's co-operatives. They also demand legislative amendments to facilitate the purchase of municipalities from co-operatives.

In the co-operative management and governance process, women have mentioned some common issues. Firstly, they pointed out that leadership is sometimes in non-transferable role. Utting's (2016) emphasis on voluntary labor is feasible with all the women in co-operative management I interviewed. Women's co-operatives are similar to the SSE for requiring voluntary labor. It has been mentioned that the members do not share responsibility in the co-operative management, and do not want to take leadership positions even though the current leaders are willing to make room for new leaders. Although women are willing to promote collective leadership in Turkey, this still remains as a problem in some co-operatives.

While the representative of Coop. 6 complained that the chairperson was taking the leadership role alone, the general idea is that women take on a collective leadership role, but that role has to be shared and taken by someone else after a while. On the one hand, this shows that democratic values are integrated into the work and women demand it, on the other hand, it is necessary to find ways to promote new women to take a leadership role in the co-operative. This role can be charged in terms of promoting women needing income. In addition, as stated by the co-operatives themselves and as can be seen in the interviewee profiles in Table 1, the participation rate of young women to the co-operatives is quite low. The participation of younger women could be a way to overcome this problem.

Research on women's co-operatives in Greece demonstrated that women have multiple roles in the co-operatives. Chairpeople in women's co-operatives have a managerial role rather than a leadership role (Aikaterini, 2015). Many women I interviewed also stated that they took an active role in competition and conflicted between members or working groups. However, I cannot suggest that they have more managerial roles. On the contrary, as I mentioned, the need for voluntary labor is very diverse, it has such a negative side for women. Yet, chairpeople who don't earn economic income through the leadership role benefit from other empowerment dimensions, like social and political.

Similar to the leadership issue, some people were informally assigned to some duties. As co-operatives highlighted, qualified members do not necessarily have to hold high education background (Coop. 1) and have knowledge of the regulations and legislation on co-operatives (Coop. 18). It is generally a very limited number of members. Besides, the people who attend the training are always the same members, so it becomes difficult to solve such problems (Coop. 1). This situation may threaten the stable management of the co-operative in the future with a great knowledge gap on co-operative issues among members, beyond the fact that the co-operative members do not benefit equally from the opportunities.

While the diverse backgrounds of women promote pluralism and inclusiveness in the co-operative, it may create another obstacle to the working order in practice. The individual discipline of the worker-members stands out as a distinctive feature according to the women's experience in co-operatives compared to professional business life. Many chairwomen complain about the work discipline in an alternative economic organization.

People who have worked before, if they come to the co-operative as partners, really see it as a job and do it. Usually, others do not work in that way. Because of this, they see our co-operative as a place where they can come to work and earn money in their leisure time apart from their housework. ... Employees do not have work discipline. (Coop. 1)

In there (in professional business life), it was more planned and scheduled. (Coop. 10)

I became a faster and much better weaver than the women who joined months before or even a year ago because I came from corporate life, a professional life; I had such concerns as work discipline, time management, production plan, cost analysis, risk analysis. ... Where there is no institutional discipline, unfortunately, you cannot expect a woman to take responsibility for the management processes of this professional structure. (Coop. 16)

These differences negatively affect the sustainability of the economic activities of the co-operative where competitive and strict conditions in the labor market are not implemented. In order to overcome this problem, some co-operatives had prepared internal regulations to clarify their own rules via participatory processes and were accepted by the General Assembly. Determination of rules through participatory processes for internal regulations may solve various problems of many other co-operatives.

The last prominent issue is to create sustainable business models and financial difficulties. First of all, due to legal regulations, tax obligations force these organizations which were mostly established with small capital. Women believe that tax exemption can solve one of the aspects of their financial problems (Coop. 2, Coop. 3, Coop. 8, Coop. 12, Coop. 16). Another problem points out that the increasing number of co-operatives creates competition among women's co-operatives and produces similar products (Coop. 2, Coop. 4). Moreover, it is very difficult to compete with other businesses in market conditions for co-operatives (Coop. 2). As an interviewee from Coop.1 explained that "It is really difficult to compete with the market. ... Our aim is not to make a profit, but to include women, to make women earn money at one point, but we do not want to compromise on quality". Women's co-operatives, which were established with small capitals face more and more difficulties in maintaining their activities with taxation in competitive market conditions.

They stated that financial problems have gradually increased, especially during the pandemic period. Yet, some women's co-operatives have turned this crisis period into an opportunity and prevented the loss of income of their members, and local farmers as well. When the pandemic broke out, the local vegetable artichoke was left in the fields, and both the farmers in the region and the co-operative partners were



economically concerned. Coop. 18 had taken on a leadership role in their local, bought all artichokes from the farmers and women started to process them during the first months of the pandemic. In addition, women invited all of Turkey to buy artichokes from their co-operatives via all media channels. Some of the women's co-operatives also expressed that they were inspired by this initiative in the pandemic crisis.

Women's co-operatives have an obstacle to create a sustainable business, just like the limited employment creation capacity of women's co-operatives in Greece (Koutsou et al., 2003, p. 5). The most important reasons are low capital, financial burdens, and women's educational and professional backgrounds in co-operatives. In addition, women's co-operatives are also underrepresented in innovative business and generally operate in similar sectors. As emphasized by the many interviewees, the promotion of young women in co-operatives is urgently needed. Thus, the participation of young women may enable the development of different business models and most probably have new axes in “the women’s co-operatives movement”.

The main problems of women's co-operatives are mostly found in common. Problems with the legal framework and legislative amendments can only be resolved by negotiating processes with other civil actors and public authorities. In terms of sustainable business and financial difficulties, women's co-operatives mainly face similar problems. In order to achieve viable solutions, women should consider the factors that rely on the sectors, the rural-urban distinction, and local resources. Still, these concerns are not unique to women's co-operatives and apply to other businesses as well. Furthermore, democratic management and governance are a more prominent issue in urban Izmir, as I have already emphasized the issue of democratization. Nevertheless, it can be said that democratization is a process and it is important for all co-operatives. The transmission of the values and principles of democracy in management and governance, production and distribution, institutional and interpersonal relations through co-operatives will contribute to the democratization of society in a broader sense.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Since the 1990s, the interest in the SSE practices by academics, public institutions, international organizations, and social movements has increased. Besides, the SSE, as an alternative development model, has been widened as a result of the increasing inequalities among and within countries due to the negative effects of development. However, many researchs remain mostly gender-blind, and women's roles and contributions to the SSEs are less visible (Federici, 2011; 2016). The increase in research focusing on the gender dimension of the SSEs will point out the role of women. In this study, I define women's co-operatives in Izmir in the SSE framework. Within the scope of this study, I focus on the women's co-operatives in Izmir in a specific region, rather than the claim of generalization of Turkey. If further research focuses on different regions, new patterns will be founded. It is parallel to the pluralistic nature of the SSE that the practices of women's co-operatives vary.

The feminist post-development theory has provided a key theoretical basis for this study, in addition to the SSE framework, which has emerged through the practices. Following WWII, most countries around the world were characterized as being reliant on development projects and eager to growth. The approach that supported a single, universal development strategy while ignoring different development strategies failed, resulting in greater inequities within and between countries. The critique of development discourse from post-development theory has been one of the most important contributions of this study (Ziai, 2004). Discursive criticism of development has allowed us to study and critique ways of developing universal ideals that do not take into consideration local and structural contexts. Even while practices differ from

one and another, the SSE framework strives to articulate certain universal sets of values and principles. This endeavor has allowed us to celebrate the diversity of practices based on specific principles, rather than stigmatizing multiple approaches and imaginaries based on local circumstances and perspectives.

Throughout this work, the critique of universalism was followed. This approach was particularly followed up when examining the possibility of women's co-operatives towards a step for gender equality through female-only organizations. The feminist contributions to the post-development approach also reveal all forms of power relations embedded in social relations to achieve gender equality (Kabeer, 2003). Feminist post-development theory is reminding the position of women in some regions that they cannot take place in mixed structures without empowerment while evaluating the studies suggesting mixed organizations for gender equality (Esim & Omeria, 2010). The post-development approach has indicated an imagination of democracy in which the power is localized, and the power is used by the people (Ziai, 2007). This approach has also provided a basis for the SSE framework and the focus to understand women's co-operatives in Izmir.

Addressing women's co-operatives from a feminist post-development perspective put forward a new framework in contrast to the universalistic approaches provided by the development approach, such as the SDGs. This is because the conditions in each community vary, and even the celebration of the diversity is essential. Furthermore, it is critical to address women's co-operatives outside of modernity and a Western-centric perspective in terms of considering local conditions against stigmatization such as the building of sexist and discriminatory, and/or exclusionary organizations. Some women, particularly in rural areas, could only join in the co-operative through into the female-only co-operative. If a co-operative structure strengthens women economically, socially, psychologically, and politically, the possibility of gender equality may be a viable and achievable option.

The major conclusions of this study, based on a review of the literature and field research, provide new insights along three axes of analysis: (i) women's empowerment

and gender equality, (ii) democratization of work and employment, (iii) transformative agenda from local.

Firstly, I suggest that women's co-operatives have created diverse practices for economic, social, psychological and political empowerment for women. There are differences among co-operatives in terms of establishment purposes, operating activities, sectors, job creation, wage level, rural/urban areas, and participatory processes. As discussed above, these differences can result in practices among co-operatives. Women who are unable to work owing to factors such as education, experience, age, or who are retired but also want additional income, have the opportunity to fulfil economic empowerment thanks to co-operatives. It is seen that women's co-operatives have members from diverse backgrounds. However, I conducted interviews with a woman from each co-operative through this study, with one exception, and I do not have appropriate information about the profiles of other women in the co-operatives.

Furthermore, some key problems that women's co-operatives face have been determined in the field research. Women generally work irregularly, unregistered, and without social insurance. According to the research, only a small amount of women work with social insurance, and most of their income is called by women "additional income". It is a crucial problem that women's co-operatives do not have an alternative employment capacity to the formal employment opportunity in the labor market. On the other hand, some co-operatives have the capacity to provide regular income for their members. When this situation is evaluated for women who are excluded from the labor market, they do not have enough skills and education to work elsewhere and cannot work in the same workplace with men due to patriarchal oppression. Women's co-operatives are the only opportunity for such women.

Income generation is a basic output of women's co-operative membership, just as with other forms of employment. However, working in a co-operative has an important role in the transition from the informal economy to the formal economy and from the subsistence economy to employment; accessing and controlling over the resources and

services; increasing their income (COOP AFRICA, 2007; Ryder, 2015; Azad 2017; Ferro-Medina, 2019). Beyond employment, women's co-operatives serve to reduce poverty, macro-level development (COOP AFRICA, 2007; Özdemir, 2013; Barut, 2017) response to forced internal displacement and advocacy for indigenous rights (Dawn 2212729 et al., 2016). It also serves to contribute to peacebuilding in conflict zones (Esim & Omeria, 2010) and provide to ethical ecological transition (Ferro-Medina, 2019). In addition, women supported via skill development (Esim & Omeria, 2010; COOP AFRICA, 2007) also have a greater opportunity in the leadership and management process. The prevalence of gender inequality issues in leadership, management, and decision-making processes in mixed co-operatives is the main evidence that women's co-operatives provide significant opportunities to support women's leadership.

In the field research, I realized that female-only joint venues are favorable for women's solidarity, sharing their common problems and finding solutions, raising women's awareness of their rights, and earn income. In response to the ongoing gender inequality in the current economic system, women have established a structure suitable for their own needs and demands to deal with the gender inequalities embedded in social relations which was pointed out by Kabeer (2003) following Ziai's (2004) critique of power relations. Beyond the traditional co-operative structure, female-only ventures can be considered women's creative and achievable resolutions in their bargaining with power relations.

Moreover, women's co-operatives are not only an opportunity to provide employment but also an opportunity for women to become socially empowered through training. Besides, they engage in leadership positions, decision making mechanisms, and policy making processes. The participation in various decision-making processes, either private and public, which affect their lives and well-being are crucial aspects as Kabeer (2003) highlights (p. 12). These opportunities can be a small step towards gender equality because it has been emphasized that there are a considerable amount of women who would not be able to work or participate in the public sphere by themselves in any other way without participating in women's co-operatives activities.

Secondly, women's co-operatives within the SSE framework adhering to democracy articulate democratic values into work and employment and create an alternative to organize the economy. In this respect, women's co-operatives offer prominent practices from the SSE framework. As Laville (2003) argues, the regulation of economic relations is possible with the democratization of the economy and women's co-operatives provide a new vision of development with a feminist alternative approach to development via women's co-operatives. With the aim of democratizing work and employment, they provide various ways and methods for production and redistribution relations, reciprocity principles, participatory processes, democratic management, and governance based on solidarity.

Practices such as establishing sustainable, grassroots structures, creating participatory processes, and equity in production and redistribution may have the potential to support and strengthen the local community towards more resilient societies, and promote more participatory citizenships as well. From the feminist-post development perspective, women's co-operatives make devaluated unpaid labor that has no financial value in the market society, such as community leadership, as a value of the development. Based on the findings, I claim that co-operatives have the potential to create alternative organizing work, building resilient communities through democratic processes with the empowerment of women. Relations with the external environment, cooperation and collaboration with public authorities, solidarity with other NGOs and co-operatives, aiming to reduce poverty and social exclusion, concerning ecology, community leadership, and need assessment practices are highly valuable steps towards building resilient communities.

Thirdly, women's co-operatives have the potential capacity to network by influencing public policy and bringing a new vision in from the local level to inspire a broader international movement. Collaboration with the other actors of the SSE is one of the key principles. In this study, women's co-operatives, which are a relatively new alternative organization model, have succeeded in creating a network with the other SSE actors and non-actors since the early years of the 2000s. Women's co-operatives in Izmir and at the national level, other types of co-operatives, Simurg Women's Co-

operative Union, FSWW, NGOs, and local governments are major actors in the network. I suppose that women's ability to create networks needs more research to understand the relationships. Moreover, the impact of networking and the link between women's co-operatives and their networks has not been demonstrated in the literature. It is clear that more research is needed in this area to comprehend the transforming effect of networks and alliances.

Women's co-operative agendas are also crucial in terms of transforming gender-blind policies beyond passive collaboration with public authorities. Because women create their own agendas based on needs, propose their agendas based on demands through collective advocacy, and share their methods and solutions with public authorities in participatory processes. If more women participate in decision-making mechanisms, this political approach may become more mainstream. For instance, they can engage in processes which allow them to be represented as women's co-operatives at the local level as well as at the national level through their networks.

While the effect of women's co-operatives has been pointed out more clearly in international research, it is unclear how and to what extent this effect is in studies in Turkey. Some vital findings were found in the data obtained in this study. Women's co-operatives create opportunities not only for women but also for men, youth, and the elderly in the region. Contributing to the farmers' production, opening a local market, and branding the region provide new opportunities for all local people. For instance, opening digital training courses for elderly people, directing unemployed youth to jobs, and collaborating with male producers have emerged because of their concern for the local community. Lastly, women's co-operatives prioritize social inclusion between villagers and urban people, educated and uneducated women, high-income and low-income women. According to their capacity, these organizations are promising to build more resilience and sustainable community, but they need to include more local people in their activities, especially the young women as they stated.

In addition, this study provides new insight into the relations of women's co-operatives with state authorities and local governments. The question of the state support, intervention and autonomy issue has not been highlighted in the literature yet. On the other side, state support for women's co-operatives has increased in the last ten years by creating funds, promotion, awareness-raising activities, supporting them with several technic services and training at the national level. The long history of co-operatives in Turkey shows that the co-operative establishment has been supported and promoted state since the Homeland Funds in 1863 (Özdemir & Başaran, 2003; Yıldırım-Kocabaş, 2011) and continued in the Republican Era (Çıkmın, 2003). Co-operatives have been considered a tool for development. Most recently, similar ideas have been on the state agenda again, and women's co-operatives are seen as an important tool for women's empowerment. Similar state support has been also practiced in Greece and Spain (Koutsou et al., 2003; Gómez Carrasco, 2019). In addition, international organizations support women's co-operatives and women in co-operatives in various ways around the world.

At the regional level, district municipalities considerably support women's co-operatives in building and field allocation, free public utility, and purchasing in Izmir. These supports given by public institutions to women's co-operatives can be considered as cooperation and collaboration between local stakeholders to contribute to a greater purpose. However, not all women's co-operatives benefit from these supports in a principled and equal way. These supports depend on the personal decisions of officials, Majors or Mayors' relatives rather than a political decision. Although such trends have been found in early and during the Turkish Republic's history, the interventions by officials at the local level and public authorities continue being more disastrous than before. The field research shows that some women's co-operatives in Izmir have been established purely for political purposes or under the guidance of political parties, and some women were assigned to the board of directors by the Municipalities. This is not only interference with the democratic functioning of the co-operative but also a great threat to organizational sustainability. However, it is important to highlight that sometimes women develop their solutions to overcome intervention and operate independently after the establishment period.



To conclude, there is no single model of women's co-operatives, there are various experiences. This structure creates viable and achievable alternatives for women. Women's co-operatives provide a new perspective for traditional co-operatives and the SSE framework following the feminist post-development theory. These experiences show that women's co-operatives are important local actors in women's multidimensional empowerment and promote gender equality. Moreover, women's co-operatives implement democracy at work and in employment. Lastly, women may become transformative agents to promote the SSE framework. More research on women's experiences will allow us to identify increased visibility of women's roles in the SSE framework. Critical feminist approaches to development are feasible to study on this topic. For further research, three unanswered questions will be important to study on. The first one is that specific indicators focused on the transformation of women's lives may well be developed to assess if women's co-operatives constitute a step toward gender equality. The second one is to measure the contribution of women's co-operatives. There's a need for detailed research that focuses on the external surroundings of the co-operatives. The last one is that women's co-operatives may be researched within their networks wherein they'll exist from neighborhood to global level by considering networks' critical role in promoting the SSE framework.

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## APPENDICES

### A. GUIDING QUESTIONS USED FOR THE FIELD RESEARCH

Kooperatifin Adı (Name of the co-operative):

*Görüşülen Kişinin (Interviewee's);*

Yaşı (Age):

Eğitim Düzeyi (Education Level):

Çalışma Yaşamı Geçmişi (Working Life History):

1. Kooperatifiniz nasıl ve hangi amaçlarla kurulduğundan bahsedebilir misiniz? (Could you please tell me about how and for what purposes your cooperative was established?)
2. Siz nasıl ortak olmaya karar verdiniz? (How did you decide to become a member?)
3. Kooperatifin faaliyet alanları nelerdir? (What are the fields of activity of the co-operative?)
4. Kooperatifinizin çalışma ilkeleri hakkında bilgi verebilir misiniz? (Could you please give me information about the working principles of your cooperative?)
5. Kurumsal yapınızın özellikleri nelerdir? Kooperatifinizi nasıl yönetiyorsunuz? (What are the characteristics of your corporate structure? How do you manage your co-operative?)
6. Kooperatifteki ortaklar arası ilişkileri nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? (How do you assess the relations between the members in the cooperative?)
7. Yönetim kurulu ile diğer ortaklar arası ilişkileri nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? (How do you assess the relations between the board of directors and other members?)
8. Karar alma süreçlerine kadınların nasıl katıldıklarını anlatabilir misiniz? (Could you please tell me how women participate in decision-making processes?)

9. Kooperatif içinde ne tür sorunlarla karşılaşıyorsunuz? (What kind of problems do you encounter in the cooperative?)
10. Bu sorunların çözümünde nasıl rol alıyorsunuz? (How do you take part in solving these problems?)
11. Daha önce deneyiminiz olduysa profesyonel iş hayatı ile kooperatifçiliği karşılaştırır mısınız? (If you have had previous experience, could you compare professional business life with cooperatives?)
12. Kooperatife dahil olmanın sizin hayatınızda nasıl değişim yarattığını düşünüyorsunuz? (How do you assess being member in the cooperative has changed your life?)
13. Sizce birlikte çalıştığınız kadınların hayatında ne gibi değişimlere yol açtı? (In your opinion, what kind of changes did it cause in the lives of the women you worked with?)
14. Yaşadığınız bölgede kadın kooperatifi kurulmasının yaşamı nasıl etkilediğini düşünüyorsunuz? (In your opinion, how do the establishment of a women's cooperative in the region where you live affects life?)
15. Kooperatifin bulunduğu yerde yaşayanlardan geri bildirim aldınız mı? (Have you received any co-operative related feedback from the local people?)
16. Yaşadığınız bölgedeki yerel yönetimlerle ilişkilerinizi nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Herhangi bir iş birliğiniz oldu mu? (How do you assess your cooperation with local governments in your region? Have you had any cooperation?)
17. Yaşadığınız bölgedeki sivil toplum örgütleriyle ilişkilerinizi nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? (How do you assess your cooperation with non-governmental organizations in your region?)
18. Diğer kadın kooperatifleriyle ilişkiniz var mı? Ne düzeyde? Hangi alanlarda görüşüyorsunuz? (Do you have cooperation with other women's cooperatives? At what level? In which areas do you contact?)
19. Bu ilişkilerin sizin faaliyetinize katkısını nasıl değerlendirirsiniz? (How do you assess the contribution of these relations to your activity?)
20. Dünyadaki kooperatifçilik ve kadın kooperatifi hareketleri hakkında bilgi sahibi misiniz? (Do you know about cooperatives and women's cooperative movements throughout the world?)

21. Bu bilgileri kendi faaliyetinize yansıtma imkânı buluyor musunuz? (Do you have the opportunity to reflect these informations on your co-operative activities?)
22. Kadın kooperatiflerinin toplumsal ve ekonomik yaşamdaki rolünü nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? (How do you assess the role of women's cooperatives in social and economic life?)
23. Sizce kadın kooperatiflerinin başarılı olmasının önündeki başlıca engeller neler? (In your opinion, what are the main obstacles to the success of women's cooperatives?)
24. Bu engellerin nasıl aşılabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz? (In your opinion, how these obstacles can be overcome?)
25. Daha başarılı olabileceğinizi düşündüğünüz farklı bir örgütlenme modeli var mı? Varsa, bu örgütlenme modelini detaylandırabilir misiniz? (Is there a different organizational model that you think you could be more successful? If yes, can you elaborate on this organizational model?)
26. Eklemek istediğiniz başka bir konu var mı? (Is there anything else you would like to add?)

## B. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ  
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Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Ayça ERGUN

Danışmanlığımı yaptığınız Kardelen Dilara CAZGIR'ın "Building Social Solidarity Economy: A Case Study of Women's Cooperatives in İzmir" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve 121 ODTU 2020 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY

Başkan

Üye

Üye

Üye

Doç. Dr. Pınar KAYGAN

Üye

Üye

Üye



## C. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

2. Dünya Savaşı sonrası, Harry S. Truman'ın A.B.D Başkanı seçilmesi sonrası yaptığı konuşmayla birlikte, kalkınma kavramı siyasi düzleme taşındı. Truman (1949), bu konuşmasıyla A.B.D'ye siyasi bir misyon yükleyerek “kalkınmamış” ulusların büyümeleri ve gelişmeleri için diğer uluslarla iş birliğinde kendi bilimsel üstünlükleri ve endüstriyel ilerlemelerinden faydalanarak yeni programlar başlatma arzusunu dile getirdi. Bu konuşmayla birlikte Truman siyasal düzlemde kalkınmış/kalkınmamış uluslar ikilemi yaratmıştır. Diğer yandan bir gecede iki milyar insanın kalkınmamış ilan edilip (Esteve, 1992) “kurtarılmaya” muhtaç uluslar görüntüsü yaratılırken, diğer yandan kalkınmanın pek çok ulus için zorunlu bir proje olduğu (Escobar, 2007) algısı yaratılmıştır. Truman'ın bu konuşması sonrası kalkınma, siyasi programların temelinde yer almış ve kalkınmanın ekonomik temelleri 1960 yılında Walter Whitman Rostow'un *Ekonomik Büyümenin Aşamaları: Komünist Olmayan Bir Manifesto* kitabıyla teorize edilmiştir. Rostow (1960) büyümeyi tüm toplumların geçmesi gereken bir dizi aşama olarak tanımlamış ve geliştirdiği büyüme aşamaları modeli, kalkınma ve modernleşmenin temel planı haline gelmiştir. Böylece kalkınmanın siyasi ve ekonomik düzlemdeki temelleri atılmıştır.

Truman'ın 1949'da ortaya koyduğu kalkınmanın siyasi ve ekonomik temellerinde dile getirdiği büyüme arzusundan bu yana, tüm teorik ve siyasi çabalara rağmen kalkınma stratejisi başarılı olamamıştır. Büyümeye dayalı kalkınma modeli, temel sorunları ve ortaya koyduğu evrensellik iddiasıyla gittikçe derinleşen yapısal eşitsizlikleri beraberinde getirmiştir. Kalkınmanın temel sorunlarından biri, toplumlar için kaçınılmaz ve mutlak bir aşama olarak görülmesidir. İkincisi, kalkınmaya ilişkin en önemli gösterge ekonomik büyüme olarak kabul edilmiştir. Ancak bu süreçte, sosyal kalkınma ve refahın adil yeniden dağıtım sistemi göz ardı edilerek hedeflenmesi, kalkınmanın başarısızlığıyla sonuçlanmıştır. Üçüncüsü, kalkınma hedeflerine ulaşmak için sanayileşmenin gerekliliği ön görülmüş, kalkınmamış ulusların sanayileşme olmaksızın ilerleyemeyecekleri iddia edilmiştir. Son olarak, kalkınma makro ölçekte ele alınmıştır; yerel topluluklar ve yerel koşullar yeterince göz önünde

bulundurulmamıştır (Aykaç, 2018, ss. 20-21). Kalkınmanın ekonomik büyüme, evrensellik, sanayileşme ve belirli değerler ve yöntemler yoluyla gerçekleşeceğine dair vadedilenler gerçekleşmemiştir. Bu süreçte, akademik çalışmalar kalkınmayı çeşitli boyutlarda eleştirerek alternatifler ararken, aynı zamanda kalkınmanın olumsuz etkilediği gruplara dair araştırmalar da ilgi göstermeye başlamıştır.

Kalkınmaya eleştirel akademik yazında öne çıkan çalışmalardan, editörlüğünü Wolfgang Sachs'ın yaptığı 1992 yılında yayınlanan “*Kalkınma Sözlüğü: Bir İktidar Olarak Bilgiye Giriş*” adlı eser kalkınma sonrası yaklaşımın öncülerinden biri olarak kabul edilmiştir. Kitabın ön sözünde Sachs (2007), kalkınma çağının sona erdiğini, bu çağın ölüm ilanını yazmanın vaktinin geldiğini öne sürmüştür. Kalkınma çağının sona erdiğine dair dönemin büyük çıkışıyla birlikte, kalkınmaya alternatif yaklaşımların nasıl ve hangi yöntemlerle olması gerektiğine dair akademik ve entelektüel sorular da ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu süreçte kalkınmaya alternatif mi yoksa alternatif kalkınma yaklaşımlarının mı benimseneceği temel soru olarak tartışılmıştır.

Bu tartışma geleneğini takip eden Arturo Escobar da kalkınma sonrası yaklaşımın öncülerinden kabul edilmiştir. Kalkınma sonrası yaklaşım, kalkınmanın tüm paradigmasını reddederek kalkınmaya bir alternatif olarak görülmüştür. Kalkınma paradigmasından tam bir kopuşu öngörmekle birlikte, yerli kültürleri ve yerelin bilgisiyle, hâkim bilimsel paradigmaya yönelik eleştirilere dayalı ve yerelden çoğulcu taban hareketlerini savunan bir alternatif olarak ortaya konmuştur (Escobar, 1995, s. 215). Kalkınma sonrası yaklaşımın diğer bir temsilcisi de erken çalışmalarında Michel Foucault'nun izinden giden Aram Ziai'nin kalkınmaya söylemsel düzeyde eleştirileriyle olmuştur. Ziai (2004) kalkınmayı söylem olarak eleştirmiştir. Kalkınmaya tek ve evrensel, tüm uluslar için geçerli bir yöntemle ulaşılamayacağını ortaya koyarken, yerelleşme, yerel hareketler, bilgi üretimi düzeyinde de yerelin bilgisine odaklanmayı öne çıkarmıştır.

1970'ler itibariyle, feminist perspektifin kalkınma süreçlerine dair analiz ve eleştirileriyle kadınların kalkınma süreçlerindeki yerine dair çalışmalar hız kazanmıştır. Bu süreçte, *kalkınmada kadın, kadın ve kalkınma, toplumsal cinsiyet ve*

*kalkınma* yaklaşımları kadının kalkınma süreçlerindeki konumunu farklı perspektiflerden yorumlamıştır (Muyoyeta, 2004). Bu üç perspektif çerçevesinde kadın ve kalkınmanın tartışıldığı bir ortamda, kalkınma sonrası yaklaşıma toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinin entegre edilmesiyle çok boyutlu bir tartışma ivme kazanmıştır. Kabeer'e (2003) göre, güç ilişkilerini ortaya çıkarmak için tüm toplumlarda toplumsal ilişkilere gömülü cinsiyet eşitsizliğini anlamak esastır. Her türlü sosyo-ekonomik baskının kesişimselliğiyle, güç ilişkilerinin ortadan kaldırılması için toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinden değerlendirilmeler yapılması kaçınılmazdır (Kabeer, 2003, ss. 1-3).

Kalkınma sürecinde kadınların konumuna ilişkin önemli eleştirilerden biri kadınların karar alma süreçlerine katılımına yönelik olmuştur. Kabeer'e göre (2003), kadınların hem özel hem de kamusal alanlarda, hayatlarını ve refahlarını etkileyen çeşitli karar alma mekanizmalarına katılım süreçlerindeki faillikleri oldukça önemlidir (s. 12). İkincisi, kalkınma sürecinde kadınların daha önce gelir getirici olmayan geçimlik faaliyetleri gelir getirici ekonomik faaliyetler olarak görünür hale geldiği ancak bu süreçte kadının yeniden üretim rollerinin baltalandığı öne sürülmüştür. Bu durumda kadınlar, anaakımlaşan kalkınma yaklaşımıyla yalnızca ataerkil yapıların izin verdiği ölçüde kalkınma sürecinden fırsatlar elde edebilmiştir. Escobar'ın (1995) vurguladığı gibi, kalkınmanın mevcut ataerkil yapı içinde bulunduğu destekle birlikte kadınlar, kadınların yeniden üretim faaliyetleri göz ardı edilerek bir anda görünmez çiftçilere dönüşmüştür (s. 172-173). Gelir getirici olmayan faaliyetlerin ve piyasa içinde üretilmeyen değerlerin görünmezliği, kadınların ataerkil güç ilişkileri içinde kalkınma süreçlerinden olumsuz etkilenmesiyle sonuçlanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, feminist kalkınma sonrası yaklaşım, kadınların kendi ihtiyaç ve öncelikleri temelinde örgütlendiği, yerel koşulları gözetken ve yerel bilgiler üzerine inşa edildiği Türkiye'deki kadın kooperatifleri modelinin potansiyelini tartışmak için teorik bir temel sağlamaktadır. Türkiye'deki kadın kooperatiflerinin kalkınma sonrası yaklaşımın izinden alternatif modeller yaratıp yaratmadığını analiz etmek için öncelikle kooperatiflere dair kısa bir özet bilgi aktarılarak, uluslararası kadın kooperatifleri literatürüne daha sonra Türkiye bağlamında kooperatifler ve kadın kooperatifleri literatürüne odaklanılmıştır.

Kooperatif modeli, 1700’lerde İngiltere’de ortaya çıkışından bu yana giderek artan biçimde önce Fransa, İngiltere ve Almanya’da, daha sonra Avrupa ile birlikte tüm dünyada yaygın örgütlenme biçimlerinden biri haline gelmiştir. Uluslararası Kooperatifler Birliği tarafından ortaya konan geniş kitlelerce Kabul gören tanımlama itibariyle kooperatif *“ortak ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel ihtiyaçlar ve istekleri, müşterek sahip olunan ve demokratik olarak kontrol edilen bir işletme yoluyla karşılamak üzere gönüllü bir araya gelen insanların oluşturduğu özerk bir teşkilat”*tır (ILO, 2006). Kooperatifler, ortak ilke ve değerlere dayalı yapılardır. Dünya genelinde 2,94 milyon kooperatifin 1,217,5 milyon üyesi bulunmaktadır. Kooperatif faaliyetleri, çoğunluğu tarım sektöründe olmak üzere 252,2 milyon kişiyi ilgilendirmektedir. (Eum, 2017, s. 12). Coğrafi olarak, kooperatifler çoğunlukla sırasıyla Asya, Afrika, Avrupa, Amerika ve Okyanusya’da almaktadır (Eum, 2017, s. 25). Kooperatifler faaliyet alanları ve amaçlarına göre ise 4 kategoriye ayrılmaktadır; (i) kullanıcı kooperatifi, (ii) üretici kooperatifi, (iii) işçi kooperatifi, (iv) çok paydaşlı kooperatifler (Eum, 2017, ss. 31-32). Kooperatiflerin kar amacı güden işletmelerden temel farkı, dayandığı ilke ve prensiplerle demokratik, çoğulcu, toplumsal sorunlara ilgili ekonomik girişimler olmasıdır. Ortaya çıkan ilk örneklerinden bu yana çağın gereklerine uyum sağlayan dinamik organizasyonlar olarak amaç ve faaliyetlerini geliştirmektedirler. Örneğin kooperatifler, gelir elde etmenin yanı sıra çeşitli sektörlerde gıda güvenliği, sürdürülebilir kalkınma, yeşil ekonomi, yenilikçi iş modelleri, yerel sorunlar ve yerel topluluk çıkarları için geniş bir faaliyet yelpazesinde çalışmaktadır.

Özellikle son yıllarda kooperatiflere yönelik ilgi her düzeyde artmıştır. Uluslararası Çalışma Örgütü (ILO), Uluslararası Kooperatifler Birliği (ICA) ve Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) gibi uluslararası kuruluşlar, kooperatifleri toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini sağlama çabalarının merkezine yerleştirilmektedir. 1995’te ICA, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliğini Geliştirmeye Yönelik Stratejisini geliştirmiş ve aynı yıl BM Pekin Deklarasyonu kabul edilmiştir. Birleşmiş Milletler (UN) kuruluşları da bu alanda pek çok politika önerileri geliştirmekte, programlar uygulamaktadırlar. Ayrıca, Sosyal Dayanışma Ekonomileri Ağı (RIPESS) gibi uluslararası örgütler de kooperatiflerde kadınların yer almasına ve

karar verici organlarda yer almalarına yönelik çalışmalar yürütmektedir. Dünya’da kadın kooperatiflerine dair, literatürde sınırlı sayıdaki birkaç ulus aşırı çalışma ve vaka çalışmalarının dışında, çoğunlukla ICA ve ILO’nun çalışmalarına rastlanmaktadır.

Kadın kooperatiflerine ilişkin uluslararası literatür incelendiğinde genel olarak Latin Amerika, Afrika ve Asya'dan çalışmalar öne çıkmaktadır. Avrupa'da Türkiye, İspanya ve Yunanistan'dan vaka çalışmalarına da rastlanmaktadır. Makro düzeyde, kadın kooperatiflerinde gelir getirici faaliyetler en önemli çıktılar olarak görülmektedir. Ayrıca, kadınların kayıt dışı ekonomiden kayıtlı ekonomiye ve geçimlik ekonomiden istihdama geçişinde, kaynaklara ve hizmetlere erişim ve bunlar üzerinde kontrolünde kooperatiflerin önemli bir rolü olduğu görülmüştür (COOP AFRICA, 2007; Ryder, 2015; Azad 2017; Ferro-Medina, 2019). İstihdamın ötesinde, kooperatifler makro düzeyde yoksulluğun azaltılmasına hizmet etmektedir (COOP AFRICA, 2007; Özdemir, 2013; Barut, 2017) ve zorla yerinden edilenler ve yerli halkların yaşamsal mücadelelerine çözümler sunmaktadır (Dawn 2212729 et al., 2016). Ayrıca, kadınların kooperatifler aracılığıyla çatışma bölgelerinde barış inşa süreçlerine (Esim & Omeria, 2010), etik ekolojik dönüşüme (Ferro-Medina, 2019) de katkı sundukları görülmüştür. Ekonomi dışı faaliyetleriyle kooperatifler, kadınların yeteneklerini geliştirmeleri için sunduğu imkanlarla (Esim & Omeria, 2010; COOP AFRICA, 2007) kadınların liderlik ve yönetim süreçlerine katılımını desteklemektedir. Karma kooperatiflerde kadınların liderliğinin arka planda kalması sebebiyle erkeklerle eşit katılmadıkları yönetim süreçlerine karşın, kadın kooperatifleri kadın liderliğini desteklemek için önemli fırsatlar sunmaktadır.

Türkiye kooperatifçilik tarihine bakıldığında, modern anlamdaki ilk kooperatiflerin ortaya çıkışı Osmanlı döneminde çiftçilere düşük faizli krediler sağlamak amacıyla Mithat Paşa tarafından 1863 yılında Memleket Sandıkları'nın kurulmasıyla başlamıştır (Özdemir & Başaran, 2003, s. 34). Cumhuriyet tarihi de dahil, Türkiye’de kooperatifçilik uzun yıllar tüketici, tarım ve kredi kooperatifleri faaliyetlerine dayalı yürütülmüştür. Bugün dahil, Türkiye kooperatifçilik tarihinde kadınların yerine dair veriler bulunmamaktadır. Türkiye’deki kooperatifçilik tarihi, bugün bilinen haliyle erkeklerin tarihi olmuştur. Günümüzde kooperatif türleri sayıca fazla olsa da

kadınların kooperatiflere katılımına dair bilgiler ve yoğun ilgi Türkiye’de ilk kadın kooperatiflerinin kurulmasıyla başlamıştır.

Kadın Emegini Değerlendirme Vakfı (KEDV)’nin 1999 Marmara Depremi sonrası sahada kadın gruplarıyla yürüttüğü çalışmalar kapsamında çadır kentlerde kurulan Kadın ve Çocuk Merkezleri modeli, Türkiye’de kurulan ilk kadın kooperatiflerinin öncül çalışmalarından olmuştur. Amaçları doğrultusunda, KEDV’in birlikte çalıştığı kadın gruplarıyla belirledikleri “kadın kooperatifi” modeli fikrinin ortaya çıkmasıyla 2002 yılı itibariyle ilk kadın kooperatifleri kurulmaya başlanmıştır. Yasal olarak diğer kooperatif türleri gibi 1163 sayılı Kooperatifler Kanunu’na tabidirler. Kadın kooperatifleri anasözleşmesine göre, kuruluş amaçları, ortaklarının ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel ihtiyaçlarını karşılamaya yönelik faaliyetlerde bulunmaktadır.

Kadın kooperatifleri ekonomik amaçlarının ötesinde, çok çeşitli amaçlarla ve çeşitli alanlarda faaliyet gösterdiklerinden çok amaçlı kooperatifler olarak adlandırılmaktadır (Duguid vd., 2015, s. 16). Literatürde kadın kooperatiflerinin kuruluş amaçları belirli konular üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Kadın kooperatiflerinin kuruluş amaçları çoğunlukla kadınların istihdama katılımı, kadınların sosyal olarak güçlendirilmesi ve kadınların ortak sorunlarına ortak çözümler üretmektir (Duguid vd., 2015). Kadınlar, kurdukları kooperatifleri ortak sorun ve ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak için kolektif çözümler geliştirebildikleri, kendileri için en ideal örgütlenme modeli olarak görmektedir (Özdemir, 2013, s, 304). Kooperatifler, kadınların ekonomik kazanımlar elde etmelerini, psikolojik ve sosyal güçlenmelerini sağlar (Varol, 2013; Çınar vd., 2019). Türkiye’de 20 yıllık geçmişe sahip kadın kooperatifleri, kadın güçlenmesine, kadın istihdamının arttırılmasına yönelik yarattıkları faydalarla kamu kurumlarının da dikkatini çekmeyi başarmıştır. Özellikle son dönemde artan Bakanlık fon ve projeleri, kamu kurumlarının ve yerel kamu kuruluşlarının kadın kooperatiflerinin kuruluşuna verdiği destekler, bu yapıların bir yandan meşruiyetini ortaya koyarken diğer yandan dış müdahalelerle bağımsızlıklarına yönelik riskleri de beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu riske dair literatürde herhangi bir eleştiri ya da kooperatiflerin olası bağımsızlık sorununa dair bir değerlendirmeye rastlanmamıştır.

Bu çalışma başladığında Türkiye'deki kadın kooperatifleri literatüründe oldukça sınırlı çalışma vardı. Son yıllarda artan akademik ilgiye rağmen hala Türkiye kadın kooperatifleri literatürü gelişme sürecindedir. Literatür incelendiğinde, birkaç ülke geneli çalışma dışında çoğunlukla vaka analizlerine rastlanmıştır. Mevcut literatür, kooperatiflerin faaliyet alanları, ortak profilleri, kuruluş süreçlerine dair hikayeler ve kadınların güçlendirilmesi hakkında bilgiler sunmaktadır. Ayrıca, kadınların kooperatifler yoluyla kalkınmaya katkısına dair vurgulara sıkça rastlansa da nasıl katkı sağladığına yönelik net ve detaylı bilgilere rastlanmamaktadır. Dahası, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, demokratik yönetim, karar alma süreçlerine katılım, yerel kalkınmaya katkıları, dış çevre ilişkileri ve ağları hakkında daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç olduğu görülmektedir.

Bu araştırma, Sosyal Dayanışma Ekonomisi (SDE) çerçevesinden, kadın kooperatiflerinin kadınların güçlendirilmesine ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine doğru potansiyellerini ve sınırlarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu tezin temel araştırma sorusu "*Kadın kooperatifleri SDE çerçevesinden kadınların güçlendirilmesine ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik yeni bir model yaratma potansiyeline nasıl ve ne ölçüde sahiptir?*". Bu soruya yanıt ararken hem literatürdeki mevcut çalışmalardan hem de İzmir'deki kadın kooperatifleriyle yapılan saha araştırmasından yararlanılmıştır. Saha araştırması, yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakat tekniğiyle İzmir'deki 19 kooperatiften 23 kadınla yapılan görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Bu tez kapsamında, kadın kooperatifleri en temelde amaç ve faaliyet alanları ile hedef kitleleri bakımından geleneksel kooperatiflerden farklılaşmaktadır. Ayrıca kadın kooperatifleri, kadınların güçlenmesi ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik potansiyellerini aşan pratikler oluşturmaktadırlar. Farklı bölgelerde, kentsel ve kırsal alanlarda farklı profillerden kadınların bir arada çalıştığı çok amaçlı modellerdir. Bu sebeple bu çalışmada kadın kooperatifleri kadının görünmez olduğu geleneksel kooperatifçilik çerçevesinden ziyade SDE çerçevesinde araştırılmaktadır. Çünkü, kadın kooperatifleri ortaya çıkış amacı ile SDE'nin ortaya çıkışı arasında benzerlikler vardır.

SDE kavramsal olarak sosyal ekonomi ve dayanışma ekonomisi kavramlarını kapsayan, kapsayıcı bir üst terim olarak kullanılmaktadır. Kavramların ortaya çıktığı tarihsel koşullar farklı olsa da bugün, SDE kalkınma paradigmasına meydan okuyarak, kriz zamanlarında, insanların 21. Yüzyıl koşullarına yönelik ihtiyaçlarına cevap veren özerk, bağımsız ve kolektif örgütlerdir. Peter Utting'e (2015) göre, özellikle Büyük Buhran ve Dünya Savaşlarından sonra 20. yüzyılda kurulamayan düzende büyüme odaklı kalkınma modeli benimsenirken, böyle bu model istihdam yaratmadan büyüme, kadının görünmeyen emeği, kadın emeğinin değersizleştirilmesi, kadınların çifte yükü, çevresel sorunların tetiklenmesi, kentsel alanlarda mekansal eşitsizlikler ve finansal krizle sonuçlanmıştır (Utting, 2015, ss. 7-9). Feminist kalkınma sonrası yaklaşımın eleştirilerine paralel olarak, İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra ortaya çıkan kalkınma yaklaşımı, ülkeler içinde ve arasında büyük eşitsizliklerle ve uzun süreli krizlerle sonuçlanmıştır. 21. yüzyıl krizinin eşitsizlik üreten doğasıyla, kadınlar, yerinden edilmişler, düşük gelirliler, yerliler, köylüler gibi marjinalize edilen gruplar SDE'nin faileri haline gelmiştir. Krizin çok boyutluluğu ve kesişimselliği ile kadınların bu süreçten en çok etkilenen gruplardan biri haline geldiği görülmektedir. Kadınlar bu krizlerde kendi kaynakları kullanıp bir araya gelerek ürettiği çözümlerle, SDE'nin yeterince görünür olmayan önemli aktörleri haline gelmiştir.

Her ne kadar SDE'nin kesin bir tanımı ve çerçevesi olmasa da dayandığı ilke ve prensiplerle ortak bir çerçeve yaratmaya yönelik girişimler olmuştur. Bu alandaki önemli aktörlerden RİPESS'e göre temel değerler: (1) demokrasi, (2) dayanışma, (3) kapsayıcılık, (4) bütünlük, (5) çeşitlilik, (6) yaratıcılık, (7) sürdürülebilir kalkınma, (8) eşitlik ve herkes için adalet, (9) insanların ve ülkelerin bütünleşmesine saygı, (10) çoğulcu ve dayanışma temelli ekonomidir (RİPESS, t.y.). Bu çalışmada, kadın kooperatifleri SDE'nin ilke ve değerleriyle uyumlu yarattığı potansiyeller çerçevesinde, pratikten teoriye doğru, evrensel yollardan ziyade çoğulcu ve çeşitli modeller yaratma çabasına yönelik analiz edilmiştir.

Sahadan elde edilen veriler değerlendirildiğinde, İzmir'deki kadın kooperatiflerinin üç temel amaçla kuruldukları görülmektedir. Birincisi, kendi ihtiyaç ve talepleri etrafında bir araya gelen yerelden kadınların kurdukları kooperatiflerdir. İkincisi, tek bir kadın liderliğinde, kadınların güçlenmesi için kurulan kooperatiflerdir. Üçüncüsü, kamu



kurumları, özellikle de belediyelerin, öncülük ettiği siyasi proje kooperatifleridir. Ancak, bu çalışmada kadın kooperatiflerinin türlerinden ziyade dönüştürücü potansiyellerine odaklanıldığından bu türler özelinde bir analiz yapmaktan kaçınılarak, her bir başlık altında türlere ilişkin karşılaştırmalarla mevcut kooperatif yapılarındaki çeşitli pratikler değerlendirilmiştir.

Literatür taraması ve saha araştırmasına dayanan analizle bu çalışmanın temel sonuçları, üç temel ekseninde analiz edilmiştir: (i) kadınların güçlendirilmesi ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği (ii) iş ve istihdamın demokratikleştirilmesi, (iii) yerelden dönüştürücü gündemler.

İlk olarak, kadın kooperatifleri kuruluş amaçları, faaliyet alanları, iş yaratma kapasiteleri, kırsal/kentsel ayrım, katılımcı süreçler yaratma açısından farklılıklar gösterse de kooperatifler kadınların ekonomik, sosyal ve psikolojik ve politik güçlenmesine imkan vermektedir. Ulusal ve uluslararası literatürdeki bulgularla benzer olarak, kadınların kooperatifler aracılığıyla gelir elde etmesi kooperatif ortaklığının en öne önemli çıktılarından. Gelir düzeyi, gelirin sürekliliği, sosyal güvenlik imkanları kooperatiflerin kapasitelerine göre değişse de uzun süreli işsizler, işgücü piyasasından dışlanmışlar ya da düşük beceri ve eğitim düzeyleri ile istihdama katılmayan kadınlar için ekonomik olarak güçlenme aracıdır. Saha araştırmasında görüldüğü üzere, özellikle de dezavantajlı kadınlar için önemli bir güçlenme sağlamaktadır. Tek ebeveyn olan ya da eşi makhum olan kadınların işgücüne kayıtlı istihdamına imkan vermektedir. Emekli olup ek gelir elde etmek isteyen, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı roller sebebiyle tam zamanlı çalışamayan kadınlar için de alternatifler yaratmaktadır. Kooperatiflerin gelir getirici faaliyetlerinin çeşitlenmesi ve sürdürülebilir iş modelleri geliştirmeleriyle kadınların istihdama anlamlı katılımında artış potansiyeli vardır.

Ekonomik güçlenmesinin yanı sıra, literatürdeki çalışmalarla benzer şekilde kadınların kooperatiflerde sosyal ve psikolojik olarak güçlendiği görülmüştür. Kadın kooperatiflerinin sosyal ve psikolojik güçlendirme yolu olarak pek çok ekonomi dışı faaliyetler yürüttüğüne rastlanmıştır. 19 kooperatiften 15'i eğitim, beceri kursları, geziler, savunuculuk çalışmaları, fuar ve festival organizasyonları gibi ekonomik

olmayan faaliyetler yürütmektedir. Bu faaliyetler kooperatifler arasında farklılık gösterse de temelde kadınların ihtiyaç ve talepleriyle şekillenen çeşitli ekonomi dışı faaliyetlere rastlanmıştır. Kadınların çeşitli eğitimler ve beceri kursları ile desteklenerek, toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı roller sonucu deneyimledikleri gıda üretimi gibi işleri profesyonel çalışmaya dönüştürme fırsatı bulmaktadırlar. Ayrıca dikiş, nakış, örgü ve el sanatları kursları ile üretime katılmaları sağlanmaktadır. Ayrıca dil kursları, özgeçmiş hazırlama, bahçecilik gibi farklı kurslarla desteklenmektedirler. Kooperatifin ekonomi dışı faaliyetlerine katılan özellikle yaş almış kadınların, dijitalleşme süreçlerine adaptasyonunu kolaylaştırmak için bilgisayar ve akıllı telefon kullanmayı öğrendikleri görülmüştür. Böylece, çevrim içi mesajlaşma, video konferans, sosyal medya kullanımı gibi hem kişisel hayatlarında hem de kooperatiflerde güçlenmelerini sağlayan yeni beceriler kazanmışlardır.

Kadın hakları ve toplumsal cinsiyet konuları başta olmak üzere bilgi edinme ve farkındalık kazanmaya yönelik eğitimlerle sosyal olarak güçlendikleri görülmektedir. Son olarak, kadınların erkek liderliğinin gölgesinde kalma riski olmadan liderlik ve yönetim süreçlerine katılmalarının ve kendi çabalarıyla ortak amaçlar ve hedeflerle bir araya gelen kadınların kooperatiflerde elde ettikleri başarıların da bir güçlenme yolu olduğu görülmektedir.

Kadın kooperatiflerinin politik güçlenmeye dair nasıl katkı sağladığına yönelik literatürde detaylı bir araştırmaya rastlanmasa da saha çalışmasından elde edilen veriler bu güçlenme türüne yönelik uygulamaları ortaya çıkarmıştır. Diğer SDE aktörleri gibi, kadın kooperatifleri de kendi sorunlarına çözüm üretmede oldukça yaratıcı çözümler üretmektedir. Kadınların yerel kaynakları harekete geçirerek, kendi gündemlerini ortaya koyup kamu kurumları ile müzakereleri ve savunuculuk çalışmaları bu güçlenme türünde önemlidir. Ayrıca, kadınların ifadesiyle “kadın kooperatifleri hareketi” içinde politik taleplerini dile getirmek için bir araya gelme, dış aktörlerle ilişkiler geliştirme, katılımcı süreçler için mekanizmalar yaratma çabaları açısından diğer SDE aktörlerine de örnek uygulamalar yaratarak kadınların politik güçlenmesine imkan vermektedir. Bu bilgiler ışığında, kadın kooperatifleri, kadınların

yalnızca ekonomik deęil çok boyutlu güçlenmesini destekleyerek, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine doğru potansiyeller taşımaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, SDE çerçevesinden değerlendirilen kadın kooperatiflerini kar amacı güden işletmelerden ayıran en belirgin özellik alternatif bir ekonomik örgütlenme olmasıdır. Demokratik değerleri iş ve istihdam süreçlerine eklemleyerek, uygulanabilir ancak bazen sınırlı, alternatif bir örgütsel model yaratmaktadır. Bu potansiyel kadın kooperatiflerinin üretim ve yeniden dağıtım ilişkilerindeki deneyimlerine, yarattıkları katılımcı süreçlere, demokratik yönetim ve dayanışmaya dayanmaktadır.

Mülakatlarda kadın kooperatifleri temsilcilerinin tümü için üretim ve yeniden dağıtım ilişkilerinde eşitliğin temel ilke olduğu görülmüştür. Ortaklar arasında ücret ayrımı yapılmamasını kar amacı güden işletmelerden temel farkları olarak vurgulamışlardır. Yevmiye, saatlik ücret vb. ücretlendirme modelleri benimsemiş olsalar da ücretlendirmede tüm ortakların eşitliğini benimsemişlerdir. Ancak, gıda mühendisliği gibi uzmanlık gerektiren birkaç meslek istisnasında ücretlendirmelerde fark olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

Demokratik katılım süreçleri yaratma potansiyeli açısından, geleneksel kooperatiflerdeki demokrasi anlayışının yıllık genel kurula katılıp oylama usulü kooperatif yönetimine katılmayı aşarak SDE çerçevesinde demokratik yönetim ve yönetim için yeni yöntemler yaratmaktadır. Kooperatif ortakları arasında iletişimin sağlandığı en yaygın kanal Whatsapp'tır. Whatsapp üzerinden, yönetime süreçlerine dair gelişmeler, duyurular, kooperatif içi çatışma çözümü gibi çeşitli konular görüşülmektedir. Ayrıca, bazı kooperatiflerde yönetim kurulu üyelerinin kadınların kararlara katılımını arttırmak için sık sık ortaklara fikirlerini Whatsapp üzerinden sorduğu görülmüştür. Whatsapp'ın yanı sıra geniş katılımlı, herkese açık çağrılarla fiziksel ve çevrim içi yapılan toplantılar da kadınların katılımını sağlamaya yönelik bir diğer yoldur.

Kadınların, kooperatiflerde demokratik süreçler yaratmak için benimsediği yaygın ilkelerden biri de sıklıkla vurgulanan yatay liderliktir. Yatay liderlik önemsenen bir konu olsa da bazı yönetim kurulu üyeleri ortakların yönetim ve liderlik süreçlerine katılmada isteksiz olduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Kadınların özellikle sosyal ve politik güçlenmesiyle yatay liderliğin, dönüşümlü liderliğin daha fazla uygulanabilir bir ilke olacağı söylenebilir. Saha araştırması göstermektedir ki, kadınlar kooperatiflerde demokratik süreçleri inşa etmede uygulanabilir başarılı örnekler yaratsalar da iş ve istihdamı demokratikleştirme devam eden bir süreçtir. Her ne kadar demokratik ilke ve değerlere bağlılık vurgulansa da bunun kadınlar için de keşfetmeye ve öğrenmeye dayalı bir süreç olduğu söylenebilir. Bu nedenle Whatsapp üzerinden yapılan oylama, sorunların görüşülmesi için fiziksel ya da çevrim içi ortamlar yaratma ya da ücretlerin belirlenmesinde ortaklarla birlikte yeni yöntemlerin denenmesi gibi her deneyim oldukça değerlidir. Kapitalist işgücü piyasasının standart ve değerlerinin dışında kadınların kendi koşullarında çözümler yaratarak alternatif çalışma ve istihdamı inşa etme çabalarında umut verici yöntemler sundukları açıktır.

Son olarak, kadın kooperatiflerinin SDE çerçevesinde değerlendirilmesiyle yerelden dönüştürücü gündemler yarattıkları tespit edilmiştir. Öne çıkan dönüştürücü gündemler: (a) ağ oluşturma, (b) kamu politikalarını etkileme, (c) yerel kalkınmaya yeni bir vizyon getirme potansiyelleridir. Ayrıca, kadın kooperatiflerinin ağlarını geliştirmesi ve dönüştürücü gündemlerinin daha geniş ağlara entegrasyonu yoluyla uluslararası hareketleri de etkileyebileceği iddia edilebilir.

Diğer aktörlerle iş birlikleri SDE'nin temel prensiplerindedir. Diğer aktörlerle iş birlikleri geliştirip, kendi ağlarını oluşturan kadın kooperatifleri 2000'lerin başından bu yana Türkiye kooperatif tarihine kıyasla oldukça yeni bir örgütlenme modeli olarak umut vaad edici örnekler yaratmıştır. 2014 yılından bu yana il düzeyindeki kadın kooperatifleri ağı, Simurg Kadın Kooperatifleri Birliği, KEDV'in bölgesel ve ulusal kadın kooperatifleri ağları gibi çeşitli düzeylerde kadınların bir araya gelmesi için çabaları, kadın kooperatiflerinin tekil işletmelerden ziyade bir hareketin, bir ağın parçası olduklarının en önemli işaretlerindedir. Ayrıca, özellikle yerel düzeydeki ağlarında diğer türlerdeki kooperatifler, sivil toplum kuruluşları ve kamu yetkilileri de

bulunmaktadır. Kadın kooperatifleri literatüründe herhangi bir çalışmaya rastlanmaya ağ oluşturma konusuna dair daha fazla çalışmaya ihtiyaç vardır.

Kadın kooperatiflerinin, kamu kurumlarıyla geliştirdikleri ilişkilerde genel olarak pasif iş birlikleri geliştirdikleri görülmektedir. Kadın kooperatifleri özellikle belediyeler ile mekan, satış kanalı, üretim tesisi gibi tek taraflı güçlendiren talepler üzerinden görüşmektedir. Ancak, kadın kooperatiflerinin toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı politikalar geliştirilmesinde, yerel ihtiyaç tespitlerinde, kamusal hizmetlere yönlendirmede yerel aktörler olarak önemli potansiyelleri vardır. Kadınların karar alma süreçlerine daha fazla katılmaları, potansiyellerini gerçekleştirmek için en kritik adımlardan biridir. Potansiyellerini gerçekleştirmek için hem ulusal hem de yerel düzeyde ağlar aracılığıyla temsiliyetin arttırılması anlamlı olabilir.

Kadın kooperatiflerinin yerel kalkınmaya yönelik getirdiği yeni vizyonda kapsayıcı bir kalkınma yaklaşımı açısından uygulamaları dikkate değerdir. Bölgelerinde kadınların yanı sıra erkekler, gençler ve yaşlılar için de çeşitli fırsatlar yaratmaktadırlar. Özellikle kırsalda üretimin devamlılığı için çiftçileri üretime teşvik ederken, yerel pazar açma ve bölgeyi markalaştırmak gibi girişimlerle bölgedeki yerel halk için de yeni fırsatlar yaratmaktadırlar. İşsiz gençleri işlere yönlendirmek, erkek üreticilerle iş birliği yapmak, yerel topluma yönelik ilgi ve kaygılarının sonucudur. Son olarak, kadın kooperatiflerinin köylü ve kentli, eğitilmiş ve eğitimsiz, yüksek gelirlili ve düşük gelirlili kadınlar arasındaki sosyal içermeye yönelik adımlar attıkları da görülmektedir.

Kadın kooperatifleri temsilcileri her ne kadar kendileri için en uygun örgütlenme modelinde yer aldıklarını ifade etseler de potansiyellerini açığa çıkarmak için çözülmesi gereken ortak sorunlarının olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Mevzuata yönelik değişiklik ihtiyaçları, sürdürülebilir iş modelleri geliştirmede zorluklar, finansal kaynak yetersizliği, kooperatiflere genç kadınların katılımını sağlayamama en çok vurgulanan sorunlar olmuştur.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma göstermektedir ki tek tipzde kadın kooperatifi yoktur, çeşitli deneyimler vardır. Kadın kooperatifleri, çeşitli bakımlardan dezavantajlı kadınlar için uygulanabilir ve ulaşılabilir alternatif örgütlenme modelleri sunmaktadır. İzmir kadın kooperatifleri örneğinde, kooperatiflerin kadınların çok boyutlu güçlendirilmesinde önemli yerel örgütlenmeler olduğu ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine doğru dönüştürücü potansiyeller taşıdığı görülmektedir. Ayrıca kadın kooperatifleri, iş ve istihdama demokratik değerleri eklemlenmede başarılı uygulamalar geliştirmiştir. Kadınların SDE çerçevesinde yürüttüğü çalışmalarda yerelden küresele dönüştürücü gündemleriyle, kalkınmada önemli yerel aktörler olma potansiyelleri vardır. Kadınların SDE içindeki rollerinin görünürlüğü için daha fazla çalışmaya ihtiyaç vardır, böylece hem kadın kooperatifleri hem de diğer SDE aktörleri için farklı deneyimleri keşfetmek mümkün olacaktır.

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