

Cooperatives of waste pickers as an alternative to social exclusion and its relationship with the homeless population'

Cooperativas de catadores de materiais recicláveis como alternativa à exclusão social e sua relação com a população de rua

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Abstract

Informal employment, which marks the reality of most Brazilian working relationships, plus the characteristics of the homeless population, constitute a social background prone to producing alternative forms of organizing work. Informal employment, as well as the homeless population, has a markedly heterogeneous composition and origin; thus, it becomes essential that any public policy related to these aspects consider their specificities. In this context, waste pickers' co-operatives appeared, consisting of ex-waste pickers and ex-homeless people, as an alternative to informality in the search for work and citizenship, within the perspective of self-management. Through an analysis of current and historical characterization experiments on waste pickers' co-operatives in Brazil, this article aims to show the capacity of the inclusive cooperative model and the relevance of these partnerships with government and with other players in society. For this purpose, it is essential to approach the successful experiences of waste pickers who, united through the co-operatives, with the participation of public and /or independently of it - were able to achieve social inclusion. Self-management is emerging as well, providing a real alternative to those who are marginalized by the formal system of work.

Keywords: Cooperativism; Waste Pickers Cooperatives; Recycling; Homeless Population; Informality at Work; Self-Management.

Resumo

A informalidade no trabalho, que marca a realidade da maioria das relações de trabalho brasileiras, somada às características encontradas na população de rua, constituem o pano de fundo social propenso à geração de formas alternativas de organização do trabalho. A informalidade no trabalho, assim como a população de rua, tem composição e origem acentuadamente heterogênea; assim, torna-se fundamental que qualquer política pública destinada a estes aspectos considere suas especificidades. Neste contexto, surgem as cooperativas de catadores de resíduos sólidos, formadas por antigos catadores de lixo e ex-moradores de rua, como alternativa à informalidade no trabalho e busca pela cidadania, dentro da perspectiva da autogestão.

Por meio de uma análise atual e de uma caracterização histórica sobre experiências de cooperativas de catadores brasileiras, buscou-se mostrar a capacidade inclusiva do modelo cooperativista e da relevância das parcerias destas com o poder público e com outros atores sociais.

Neste escopo, é fundamental a abordagem de experiências bem sucedidas de catadores que, unidos sob a égide do cooperativismo, com a participação do poder público e/ou independentemente dele – puderam lograr a inclusão social. A autogestão desponta, assim, como alternativa real de trabalho àqueles que se encontram marginalizados pelo sistema formal de trabalho.

Palavras-chave: Cooperativismo; Cooperativas de catadores de material reciclável; Reciclagem; População de rua; Informalidade no trabalho; Autogestão.

The homeless

Historically, the treatment conferred on the homeless was predominantly hygienist, medicalized, reducing an intensely complex situation to a merely pathological conception.

Dealing with the issue of homelessness, Andrade et al. (2008), corroborated this understanding, emphasizing that these individuals experienced only repressive treatment and “hygienist” policies. Little was done in the sense of effectively getting to know this population to then direct policies appropriately.

Justo (2008), highlights the extremely heterogeneous character of the homeless population, be that in its composition, origin, the motives which led such individuals to live on the streets etc., and, from a historical perspective, asserts:

For Marx, the “beggar” of early modernity was the result of two processes: expropriation and legislation. That is to say, the “beggars” of the 14th to 16th centuries were ex-peasants who had lost their land and migrated to cities and were then subjected to laws regulating their conduct in this new social environment. The laws stated who was allowed to beg, and when. The distinction between worker and tramp was at stake (Justo, 2008, p. 3).

The standard of legality approached by Marx is currently reflected by the State’s actions in exercising its authority and, from a sociological point of view, this social control, often translated into aggressive and prejudiced attitudes from the government itself towards the people is, in fact the legal expression of state authority (Justo, 2008). The author concludes that, faced with other causes, the main justification for the existence of homelessness is invariably linked with social condition and political context.

More specifically concerning the situation in Brazil, Belo Horizonte was the setting for a study by Viana et al. (1992), which outlined the profile of the homeless in this municipality and, as well as attesting to the intense heterogeneity of these individuals, drawing an interesting division between the people living in the streets. The first group consisted of those who “*ficam na rua*”, temporarily on the streets, principally made up of individuals who have been unemployed for a long period, or those who have migrated from other cities seeking,

for example, medical treatment. This group differs from those who “*estão na rua*”, those who are more permanently on the streets and who, with greater intimacy with the reality of life on the streets, begin to undertake activities for their subsistence - this would include those who collect cans or paper, etc. Finally, the researchers highlighted individuals who “*são da rua*”, they are from the streets, homeless for many years and, in consequence, often with physical and mental health problems, resulting from drug and alcohol abuse and poor diet. The result of these studies leads to an undeniable conclusion: just as there are a variety of causes of informal employment, when dealing with the homeless, their specificities should also be taken into account, if an effective solution to this problem is to cover all of those who live on the streets. From this perspective, efforts have been made by certain researchers to really understand the homeless population.

Jacobi and Teixeira (1997) attribute the poor economic performance and crises of unemployment observed in the 1990s, causes which had a great impact on the composition of the homeless population:

[...] today, it is mainly made up of those who have been excluded from the job market and affected by a situation of abject poverty which has afflicted a considerable proportion of citizens; leading to family break up, social rupture and completely doing away with these people's self-esteem (p. 6).

Varanda and Adorno (2004) understand that the difficulties related to the homeless population is inter-disciplinary, and the solution to which goes beyond hygienist, medicalized policies or even those which are exclusively social assistance. The homeless population should be seen in a sociological context and, within this, approach the definition of health care, which requires a direct relationship between this population and institutional processes, including - and with special emphasis on the subject of this article - parallel economies and informal employment.

Following this sociological approach, Magera (2005), researched cooperatives of waste pickers in different cities in the state of São Paulo, seeking to identify their origins - many of whom had formerly lived on the streets. The research also showed that

there was a common path in the current cooperatives, passing through informal employment (when they found themselves unemployed, as noted by Jacobi in the excerpt above), represented by the stage in which the cooperatives were autonomous waste pickers. From this perspective, it was noted that:

It was noteworthy that the majority of the cooperatives, 58%, were aged over 40 and were from the State of São Paulo (52%), the majority, at least a quarter of them, had worked in factories, while another 20% had been domestic workers, compared with 18% who formerly worked in construction and 16% in ceramics. The majority of them had been unemployed between one and two years before entering the recycling cooperative (Magera, 2005, p. 37).

The excerpt above shows the relevance of cooperative enterprises as an alternative for socially excluded individuals - be they unemployed, living in the street, who manage to find paid work and, above all, managed according to their needs. So, we now move on to studying the origin and characteristics of the cooperativist model.

The cooperative

Various researchers have sought to explain in detail the origins and mechanisms of the functioning of the cooperativist system. Nascimento (Nascimento, F.R., 2000) refers to the appearance of cooperativism not as an alternative to economic systems in crisis but rather as an **option of effective economic organization**. From a capitalist perspective, it is enough to remember that the **natural adjustment** advocated by classical economists has been shown to be inefficient in re-establishing the recommended balance - which guarantees the accumulation and distribution of wealth **fairly and equally**. On the origin of capitalism, the author argues:

If the ideals of liberty were not fully achieved with the passing of time, through the diversity of the environment and the heterogeneity of individuals and their intrinsic characteristics, meaning that some benefit more than others, creating marked differences, it should not be forgotten that in primitive societies questions of survival were resolved in the spirit of cooperation and community develop-

ment, by the need for self-preservation. The basic difference between these societies and current society is that they were very conscious of this fact and although they could not speak of cooperatives within the legal framework we use today, they could speak of a conscious effort to cooperate to ensure the preservation of the human being and to help in dealing with hunger, disease and epidemics (Nascimento, F. R., 2000, p. 11).

Singer (2002) sought to discover what it was that led certain individuals to unite and form cooperatives; according to the author, it is the logic of capitalism itself. However, one of the basic foundations of this logic is the existence of a reserve of workers, meaning that there is abundant available labor, controlling salaries and increasing profits for the capitalist, owner of the means of production. In this sort of situation, certain marginalized individuals - in the case of this article, those stereotyped as “waste pickers”, the majority of whom are homeless, earning a pittance for the little material they manage to collect - perceive that, if they unite, they can collect more products to sell, increasing the amount of money they receive. This is one of the practical results obtained from the existence of cooperatives.

In a brief summary, we can highlight some of the main characteristics of cooperatives: firstly, it is worth noting the following important distinction: cooperatives are a type of organization, which also includes associations, another type.

Finally, it is also worth noting that, from a legal point of view, cooperatives are companies, regardless of their social objective. Iacomini and Rocha (2009), explaining this type of company, state that, although they have essentially economic aims, their objective is not to make a profit - even if this ends up being obtained as a result of their activities. Any profit made should be re-used to further develop the cooperative's activities. Moreover, cooperatives are organized along the lines of solidarity, meaning all associated should participate equally and freely, with obligatory participation in all meetings of the cooperative (Piccinini, 2004).

After this brief analysis of some of the main general elements of cooperatives, we look further into specific aspects of cooperatives of waste pickers in Brazil.

The formal model of waste pickers' cooperatives in Brazil

The model of current waste pickers' collectives with which we are familiar is marked by partnership with municipal prefectures, characteristic of the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo and spread throughout the country from the 1990s onwards. This partnership is essentially formed by the municipal prefectures providing sorting sheds, equipment and refuse collection vehicles (Ribeiro and Besen, 2007), while the cooperatives provides the workforce.

Extrapolating this partnership system in the Brazilian legal system, there is a clear incentive to form cooperatives and associations. In the 5th Article in the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988), paragraph XVII, they are licensed to form without need for authorization, as long as they follow the regulations in the specific legislation. The differentiated treatment given to cooperatives in terms of tax (Federal Constitution, Article 146, III, item c) and the express support given to this type of association by the legislation (Article 174, paragraph 2 of the constitution) should be emphasized. Recently, the creation of the National Policy of Solid Waste though law 12,305/2010, regulated by Federal Decree 7,404/2010 gave the Union of municipalities responsibility for integrating cooperatives of waste pickers on low income and went still further, giving that public body the responsibility for improving working conditions for the cooperatives (paragraph III, Decree 7,404/2010).

Federal Law 5,764/71 (Brasil, 1971), which established the so called legislation of cooperativism, emphasizes the clear tax incentive given by the state to such organization and, in the chapter specifically about associations, the possibility of employment. This possibility is an exception to the classic cooperativist model; the rule is that all cooperatives are made up of members who, as such, have the right to vote in meetings, deciding together the paths the cooperative will follow, as explained above when discussing characteristics of the cooperativist model.

In turn, the Brazilian Civil Code (Brasil, 2002), in article 982, highlights that all cooperatives, regardless of their social objective, are companies, in contrast to the concept of entrepreneurial companies, which always aim to develop their economic activity.

In the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (MRSP) there is a considerable number of waste pickers' cooperatives working in partnership with the authorities through agreements with municipal prefectures. However, when reporting some experiences of Brazilian waste pickers' cooperatives, it is worth noting their trajectories which, at least in their initial stages, received decisive support from other sources.

This article makes use of data, experiences and knowledge acquired through research on which the Master's dissertation was based (Magni, 2011). This research aimed to draw up a general overview of cooperativist legislation - as the background to the development of relationship which appeared while it was in force -, as well as a broad history of Brazilian waste pickers' cooperatives experiences. Within this scope, emphasis is placed on cooperatives in Belo Horizonte - the subject of a previous study, carried out by a group of researchers who are cited in this article, exclusively involving the relationship with the homeless population - and those in the municipality of São Paulo, as this municipality was chosen for the practical research activities, described below.

The preliminary stages having been conducted, we moved on to the case study, involving 2 cooperatives in the municipality of São Paulo - *Cooperação and Cooperlicério* - which were subject to verifying issues concerning sustainability. Such issues, in turn, were drawn up by Dr Gina Besen (2011), in her Doctoral thesis.

Thus, below we present the different experiences of cooperativist ventures, also covered in the above mentioned dissertation.

The experience of waste pickers' cooperatives in Brazil

ASMARE in Belo Horizonte

ASMARE - Association of Collectors of Paper, Cardboard and Recyclable Material in Belo Horizonte - its origin was directly linked to the issue of homelessness in the state capital of Minas Gerais, seeking to change the situation through social inclusion, it is today a model for cooperatives throughout Brazil.

Some researchers dedicated themselves to discovering and understanding the process which led to its creation, given the particular character surround-

ing its founding. Among them, we highlight the researcher Valeria Heloisa Kemp who, in addition to investigating the origin of this cooperative, though studies carried out within it - such as that of the situation of each member - as well as using statements collected directly from members, managed to outline the panorama of administration used here.

The *Pastoral de Rua* of the Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, together with other social movements in that city investigated the homeless population and found a factor fundamental to understanding this group of marginalized individuals: their intense heterogeneity. Armed with this knowledge, these bodies promoted research, at the end of the 1980s, aiming to better understand the homeless population and, therefore, to design more efficient social actions which would, in fact, improve the situation of this population. They sought

[...] to promote organization on the part of these men and women, encouraging them to struggle to see their work valued. Above all, we aimed to encourage these individuals to rescue their citizenship, condemned to live on the streets and deprived of any rights (Gonçalves et al. 2008, p. 231).

Considering the point of view of the waste pickers, Kemp (2008) shows how the moment in which ASMARE came into being was a time of great struggle. As they lived in the streets, they suffered from all kinds of marginalization, including in relation to the Authorities. In addition to the total lack of recognition of the work they were doing, they felt feared and rejected by the population and repressed by the Authorities, manifested in countless attempts by the police to expulse them from the center of Belo Horizonte. This was clearly a hygienist policy which, according to the understanding of Jacobi and Teixeira (1997) occurs:

On the part of the Authorities when there is a lack of real understanding of the origin of the problem in question, which are notable, generally repressive initiatives aiming to remove them from circulation following the argument of the need to keep the city streets "looking clean" and to preserve the citizens' "safety". These being understood to be individuals out doing their shopping or those who live nearby to areas with concentrations of homeless (p. 6).

Still on the topic of this period of struggle to be recognized by the Authorities - and of the stage of Benedictines from the *Pastoral da Rua* getting close to them -, Torres (2008) collated the testimony of a member who experienced the early years of struggle to establish the cooperative:

At that time the prefecture was not our partner. It was the enemy. We were always being followed in the streets, accused of dirtying the streets. So, we began to unite. But it was difficult to accept the *Pastoral*, we thought they were there to harm us, that they were the law. Later we came to trust them, they were very patient with us. They started to help us, to discover us. They asked where we came from. Why did we collect paper? So we began to meet under the trees here in the village. This used to be known as the village (p. 61-62).

The hope of leaving the streets required organized work which would provide enough income for a life with dignity. The author affirmed that, from this perspective, the waste pickers became conscience that it was only in partnership with the authorities and with other organizations in civil society that they would, in fact, be able to establish themselves away from the streets. As stated above, the activity of the *Pastoral da Rua* was essential - initially through meetings that, through consensus, established common goals for everyone and, later, in identifying the real economic activity being carried out by the waste pickers, in order to have them effectively form part of urban cleaning and collecting services - this activity being understood by the *Pastoral* itself as being the opposite of welfarism.

The researcher also reports how the motivation to form a cooperative appeared through the waste pickers identifying themselves with the project. It could not be any other way: the project was born from activities already being carried out by the waste pickers and they expressed the desire to be regularized, to have regular employment which generated income and valued their work.

Thus, within this context of struggle, ASMARE was legally established in 1990. The struggle continues today, but the resistance on the part of the authorities underwent a substantial change in 1993, when a new municipal administration, with a more

marked commitment to social movements, took over. It was then possible for ASMARE to establish effective partnerships with the authorities, influencing social and environmental public policies.

From that moment onwards, the waste pickers, supported by the *Pastoral*, by other civil society movements and by the authorities managed to obtain recognition, coming to be considered important environmental agents, effectively important in collecting recyclable waste.

The mobilization and coordination of the waste pickers, forged as the result of long-standing conflicts, especially with the authorities, represented hope and encouragement for a new form of sociability and for conquering new spaces in which to practice citizenship. This space is ASMARE, founded on 1st May 1990 aiming to guarantee the right work in the city and to achieve social visibility and recognition. After this organization, the associated waste pickers began to form a reference framework in the city and ASMARE became nationally known as a model for social inclusion projects for these workers (Freitas and Neves, 2008, p. 97-98).

Freitas (2010) studied statements from ex-homeless individuals in Belo Horizonte - who became members of ASMARE - and managed to translate a parallel individual history for each of them with the particular political situation at each corresponding moment in history, reiterating what was previously highlighted in this dissertation when dealing with the unavoidable link between political and social spheres.

The author also highlights the inclusion/exclusion binomial, so strongly present in the lives of these cooperative members. From the era in which there members lived on the streets onwards, their greatest wish was to have the right to work in the city and to have social visibility, as described above. However, even several years after the definitive organization of ASMARE, the statements of these members are still marked by quotes about “no rights”, in other words, rights still not achieved. The authors infer that this insecurity is due to the acquisition of effective citizenship being so recent, it needing to be cultivated and perpetuated so that former homeless individuals can indeed consider themselves to be socially included.

Cooperatives in São Paulo and their intrinsic relationship with the homeless population

A fact which is worth emphasizing concerns the direct relationship between the homeless population in the municipality of São Paulo and the formation of importance cooperatives of waste pickers in this municipality, such as *Cooperglicério* - the history of which will be covered in more detail later -, Coppel and Coopamare.

Costa (2007), in an outstanding dissertation on the topic, covered the history of the creation of diverse cooperatives - especially those located in the center of São Paulo, besides the expected poverty of the periphery -, all of them with intrinsic links to the homeless population. The author outlines the usual trajectory of members of this population - which is also common to those who become waste pickers -, also observed by Magera, as observed above: at itinerary of successive losses which leads to the street, distancing themselves from the family, close to drink and far from the world of work (Costa, 2007).

The author also highlights the common origin of all these cooperatives: in the 1970s homeless individuals began to organize themselves and to “agitate”, with strong participation of the Catholic Church and of Christians in general; it was only in the 1990s, however, that the population became a field of public intervention, state action and tertiary sector organization, with the aim of establishing relations between poverty and a viable alternative for labor occupation, recognition as a homogenous group (although it was not) and moving towards social inclusion. And it is in just that period that organization of waste picker organizations appeared, forged through partnerships with the State and/or with non-governmental organizations.

We now go on to analyze Cooperglicério, constituted in the center of São Paulo, at the heart of the reality highlighted above.

Cooperglicério: from meetings of cart drivers to cooperativism

The origin of this cooperative, located under the *Glicério* viaduct, in the central region of São Paulo, is linked to the Franciscan friars in the Largo de São Francisco. Such a type of cooperative represents again the association between ex-homeless

individuals and social movements but which, in this case, had some small help from the authorities - they provided the space in which the cooperative would be formed.

According to the personal account of the then president of *Cooperglicério*, Sr. Romeu - who had actively participated in the cooperative’s activities since it appeared, the Largo de São Francisco was where the waste pickers met. There, each cart driver - the vast majority being homeless - brought their carts, roughly separated the waste they had collected and sold it independently, earning little from what they sold. The Franciscan friars tried to negotiate higher values for the cart drivers, as well as offering them food. This only changed in 2006 when, through the efforts of the Franciscan Recycling Support Service - Recifran - and of the union of cart drivers, the possibility of receiving a donation of land from the prefecture appeared, located under the *Glicério* viaduct, which would come to shelter the future cooperative. Still according to the president of *Cooperglicério*, Recifran enabled the cooperative to be registered in the National Register of Legal Entities, as well as formalizing its existence as a cooperative. In his own words, however: Recifran wanted us to be its employees. We were not treated as members of a cooperative; the model they used with us was capitalist. We did not want that; we wanted to be a cooperative, not to have an owner, we wanted to manage our money, manage our space. So we split from them after they helped us to register ourselves properly. What we have today is a real cooperative.

The statement of the then president denotes a feeling of discomfort with the interference of the other organization giving orders in a situation that the cart drivers had dreamed of very differently. Barros and Pinto (2008) highlighted that:

Participating in an associative movement constructs a political identity and creates sociability based on solidarity and in the existence of a common project to transform relationships of exploration and oppression, substituting the individualism with which these groups previously operated before the organization process. Thus, the inter-relationship between the poles: more aware cart drivers, committed groups of ONGs and the authorities is essential (p. 76).

Faced with this former interference by Recifran, *Cooperglicério* offered, as far as possible, training courses to its members, promoted by NGOs and, particularly, by the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, with the perspective of raising the awareness of values and principles of cooperativism among the cooperative members. These courses were; however, sporadic and, given the high turnover of members, they ended up not covering all of the members. Thus, it was no coincidence that effective knowledge of cooperativist principles is lacking in *Cooperglicério* members, with implications for the effective social inclusion of these members.

COOPAMARE: pioneer in collecting and sorting recyclable waste

The Cooperative of Autonomous Paper, Scrap and Recyclable Materials Collectors (COOPAMARE) is another example of a cooperative founded essentially by the actions of collectors, together with certain sectors of civil society. The oldest cooperative in Brazil was founded in 1989 after a party - The Mission - thrown by the Fraternal Aid Organization (FAO), an organization which since 1955 has conducted countless social inclusion projects for the homeless. During The Mission party, the homeless population participating in the event were asked to make donations and that of the paper collectors was the most substantial.

Aware of their productive capacity, these waste pickers then started to meet in the Community Center for Street Dwellers in the Glicério region (center of the city of São Paulo) and formed an association, with the aiming of achieving better prices for the material they collected. The Prefecture of the Municipality of São Paulo, in turn, provided a property in the Pinheiros region, located under the Paulo VI viaduct, which is still the headquarters of COOPAMARE. The establishment of this cooperative was down not only to its members but also to associations represented by autonomous waste pickers, who sold their material to the cooperative. Freitas (2010) highlighted how, in 2006, COOPAMARE underwent a broad restructuring, due to changes in the administration of the municipal prefecture of São Paulo, which provoked changes of an hygienist character, even placing at risk possession of the terrain provided by the prefecture itself.

It was within this context that a wider investigation was carried out into the cooperative's self-management, considering aspects of interpersonal relationships and the cooperativist principles of solidarity, starting from the crisis situation in 2006, up to 2010. The results of this research indicate that the cooperative grew substantially, it having around 50 permanent members in 2010. Other significant results were the relative increases observed in the members' incomes, as well as an increase in the number of partnership agreements, which even led to a housing construction project for the members.

Concerning issues of self-management, it was observed that there was an increase in the regularity of management meetings. However, a group coalesced, called the central nucleus, which ended up making the most important decisions for the cooperative, to which the other members were resigned. This type of management approaches that of pure capitalism, in which the majority of the members understand that those who make up this group are, in fact, the owners of the cooperative. Even when faced with this situation, the members claim they are satisfied, as with the increased income they can finally acquire their long awaited citizenship.

Final considerations

It is worth noting, in these final considerations, the relevance of social inclusion of waste pickers as a basic premise for promoting the health of such individuals. In addition to the inherent benefits in increased, stable and constant income, which enabled them to have better living conditions - from diet, to more sanitary conditions, access to medication, etc., all elements identified by the waste picker cooperative members in this present research - it should also be born in mind that the inclusion encouraged by the entrance of these workers into an organized cooperative brings with it another benefit; a better working environment. On this point, Jacobi and Besen (2011) emphasize that:

The majority of waste pickers work independently in conditions which are precarious for their safety and health in the city streets. Household waste is left in the street in garbage bags, generally between 30 and 100 liters, to be collected, although

recyclable material such as newspaper and paper is often separated. The majority of waste pickers use carts or barrows loaded, on average, with around 500kg, and sometimes up to 800kg, and collect in residential and commercial regions which discard more recyclable material [...] (p. 149).

We also consider it relevant that the greatest difficulty the waste picker cooperatives find, from the point of view of managing, is reconciling their businesslike economic activity with the principles of self-management, it is no easy task to incorporate a self-management model with the everyday activities carried out are marked by the more participative forms of the cooperative members. This becomes more relevant in cooperatives which are not able to provide all their members with training in cooperative values and principles, which leads to various distortions, affecting the social inclusion of these individuals. It should, however, be remembered that a fundamental aspect of self-management is the right to *experiment*. Thus, Nascimento (Nascimento, C. A., 2003) emphasizes:

The right to experiment should be the first task of a Government which defends the perspective of self-management. However, the right of collective experimentation with new forms of living and working cannot not be constructed from the top down through State initiatives. Economic solidarity and self-management is constructed on initiatives from civil society, in companies, in neighborhoods and in municipalities (p. 5).

It is thus we understand the path being followed by the cooperatives featured in this article, founded through their own efforts or through those of partners in civil society, is leading to the construction of real developments in solidarity, generating income and continuing to guarantee social inclusion for their members. Finally, as an important element indicating such advances, we have the cooperatives' members' conception of the work they do not merely as a source of income but also as a means of achieving social recognition and value. Thus, one of the essential requisites of the survival of cooperative enterprises is fulfilled: disassociating the idea of work as a means of satisfying basic needs, but also allied to the workers' convictions and ideas.

Thus, we understand that the cooperatives should remain as partners of organizations which enable them to provide their members with training in effective self-management. Or, alternatively, the authorities, in the form of the municipality, considering the directives of the National Policy of Solid Waste, should also take responsibility for guaranteeing real access to social inclusion for the waste pickers, consolidating a transformation which began in the 1990s - as highlighted in this article -, but which still does not allow this population to effectively abandon their marginalization.

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