

Collaborative networks among family farmers in Vale do Ribeira: the construction of solidarity economy alternative and a common political agenda

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1. Introduction

The growing social, economic and political challenges faced in different parts of the world demand the creation and development of new approaches to human interaction between themselves and nature. The paradigm shift behind these necessities revitalizes the concept of the commons (Ostrom et al., 1999; Ostrom, 2002; Subirats, 2013). Commons can be viewed as collective management models that propose resource management and a new political and social praxis. Consequently, reactivating this model diverges from hierarchical structures and aims for "the creation of new practices rooted in increased social agency and the collective assertion of a habitable planet for the human species" (Collado et al., 2017, p.42). One of the experiences that can be seen as the practice of a modern commons is the strategies of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) (Collado et al., 2017). The SSE might discover an intriguing management model in the Commons, with the potential to scale its applicability quantitatively and qualitatively.

Therefore, this article aims to analyse, through a unique case study, how COOPERCENTRAL VR consolidated itself as an instrument for family farmers in the Vale do Ribeira (São Paulo/Brazil) to become significant political agents at the local and regional levels. What this article specifically explores are the management and governance tools, both material and symbolic, which allowed an initially economic alternative to ensure not only the strengthening of the agency capacity for cooperated family farmers but also the construction of new subjectivities. Thus, this study aims to present some essential elements that gradually shape the phenomenon under analysis: the formation of COOPERCENTRAL VR and the consolidation of the agency capacity of family farmers. Also, the consolidation of the collective as an essential political actor within the region. As a result of all these components, the economic and political praxis realized by the COOPERCENTRAL VR can be seen as a practice of commoning itself (De Angelis & Harvie, 2014).

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For this purpose, this article is divided into five stages. The first stage involves a brief theoretical discussion on the concept of commons (Ostrom et al., 1999; Ostrom, 2002; Subirats, 2013), public action (Cefai, 2017; Lascoumes & Wales, 2012; Spink, 2019) and governance (Brugué et al., 2013; Mendell & Alain, 2015; Ostrom, 2002; Salmon, 2001), highlighting the new relationship that emerges between the State and social actors in constructing the public agenda and seeking responses to public issues. The second stage explains the methodology employed in this investigation and outlines the analytical framework used for describing and analysing the case. Subsequently, the discussion focuses on the results themselves, aiming to explore, through a narrative strategy, which elements might explain the transformation of family farmers into political subjects. Finally, the article concludes with the findings and outlines new research agendas from this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 New Commons and “commoning”

The definition of Modern Commons is still an open dispute; however, this concept opens space for creating collective governance models beyond the dichotomy between the state and market (Ostrom, 1990, 2002). On one hand, Commons can be defined as a concrete set of models of management and governance of goods or services, which are not necessarily public or unlimited but can aim at collective well-being, fairer gains, and more significant redistribution (Saidel, 2019). On the other hand, the Commons can be seen as a model of governance and management of material goods and as a broader process - called “commoning” (Massimo & Havie, 2014). This process concerns itself with the materialities of social reproduction but also with the production of more horizontal social relationships and processes of democratic and participatory decision-making (Ibid.) Within this same logic, Subirats (2013) established that this process creates a series of rules and institutionalities about access and use, which sustain a new management and governance model based on social protagonism and mobilization.

Therefore, the concept of the Commons and “commoning” revalorize cooperation and self-management practices, which consider the need to ensure and strengthen interdependence relations between different actors so that they can create a collective body. Thus, different actors who, for some reason, decide to act collectively gain awareness of the benefits of sharing and reducing costs and externalities (Subirats, 2013) - being able to achieve efficient results in economic and collective well-being (Ostrom, 1990). Hence, the Commons are based on three aspects (Méndez de Andés, 2015): 1) In the resource or asset that will be managed, 2) in the community responsible for its production and reproduction, and 3) in the management model chosen by this same group, which concerns its rules, ways of doing and

institutions. That is why, "common is based on a shared activity or task and not on an ontological condition"⁵ (Saidel, 2019, p.20).

This new action frame involves constructing and practicing a new political framework that is more egalitarian, deliberative and inclusive (Collado et al., 2017). Consequently, the Commons can also be seen as a political principle (Saidel, 2019) because, from this collective action, a new political praxis is configured. Besides, this new praxis can allow the gain of shared subjectivities and political agency to the community and the possibility of new agents to influence the political arena and make decisions regarding the management of essential resources, goods and services (Esteves et al., 2021). The following section is dedicated to reviewing the public action concept and the instruments that make it possible for local actors to become political actors and influence the political agenda.

2.2 Public Action

The formation of new subjectivities and the agency capacity of social actors to consolidate a new political practice revolves around the concept of public action and its instruments (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012). Within this perspective, the participation of social actors becomes relevant, and those who previously occupied the position of the governed become participants in a new process of negotiated governance marked by dynamics of power, representation and meaning. From the collective recognition that there is a problem experienced jointly, and from the moment this collective seeks to publicize this issue, negotiation spheres grow, where different actors share common experiences and seek solutions (Cefai, 2017). Therefore, it is within a process of convergence and divergence of different collective problems that local actors manage to enter the public agenda and demand an institutional solution (Cefai, 2017; Lascoumes & Wales, 2012). This is why it is crucial to understand the instruments that enable public action and the publication of a collective issue through different means.

Community-led initiatives are promising spaces for a particular problem to become a public issue and for a group of actors to recognize themselves as an affected collective due to their negotiation, deliberation, and mobilization dynamics. These community-led initiatives include the Social and Solidarity Economy. Local actors can create a field of collective experience, symbols and new organizational structures through the dynamics that emerge within these collectives. The result is acquiring the capacity and a shared repertoire to publicize a need or problem. Individuals can become political actors through this persuasion process for collective solutions, by creating a collective memory and a shared discourse (Cefai, 2017; Esteves et al., 2021). After recognizing a collective and a common issue, different instruments can be adopted for this problem to be seen as a public issue, surpassing the limits of the

⁵ Personal translation.

created collective thereby operationalizing governmental action as well. The nature of these instruments can be legislative, economic, informational, and persuasive (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012). Some examples of them are articulating different actors; representing social groups, needs and proposals; creating new symbolisms and common discourses; consolidating new power relations; transforming the mode of governance and using persuasion and convincing strategies, among others.

Through this action, social actors acting collectively can begin to influence public opinion, government decisions, legislative processes and administrative choices. Consequently, the collective problem becomes a public problem, acknowledged by society and the State (Cefai, 2017). As a result of this process, a new role for public power emerges and also a new dynamic between government and non-government actors. So, the next section is dedicated to discussing the collaborative governance model and the construction of new subjectivities that the presence of distinct actors in problem-discussion and problem-solving dynamics requires and implements.

2.3 New Governance, New Subjectivities

As explored before, public action is characterized by the rearrangement of power relations among different actors, the process of public debate around collective issues and the interconnectedness between different problems (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012). It is precisely due to this multiplicity of factors and actors that the hierarchical governance model opens up space for new references of scales and territories for the decision-making process and the construction of public policies within what can be termed negotiated governance (Ibid.).

With new actors engaging in the political process, the logic of the State's unilateral decision-making responsibility for constructing public policies is disrupted (Spink, 2019). The assurance of the community's well-being requires more than unilateral actions by the State, and State interventions must be closely linked to the actions and projects of the community itself (Ostrom, 1990). The government's role is no longer of a simple and sole provider and planner. The construction of solutions to public problems has become a complex process that requires ongoing institutional adaptation and evolutionary learning (Cefai, 2017) within a much broader and complex network of actors seeking to address public issues (Salamon, 2001). Differently, the government's role becomes to be a facilitator and aggregator of other actors, building interdependence networks of cooperation and dialogue within collaborative processes of multi-level governance involving governmental and non-governmental players (Brugué et al., 2013; Mendell & Alain, 2015; Ostrom, 1990, 2002; Salamon, 2001).

Moreover, this emerging governance model requires specific capabilities (Salamon, 2001). Firstly, it involves activating collaboration networks to build responses to public problems, which can be led by either the State or non-governmental actors. Additionally, it necessitates

the ability to lead various actors in adopting new practices related to resource utilization, knowledge generation, understanding raised issues, and convincing stakeholders about public matters and potential solutions. This encompasses negotiation processes and mediating conflicting interests. Lastly, it involves the ability to generate incentives and disincentives to balance interdependence among the various actors involved.

The discussion about a new multi-level and collaborative governance revives the initial debate about modern commons, as the revival of the commons concept necessitates a new institutional and organizational structure. The construction of new models that enable social protagonism for solving public issues in pursuit of greater collective well-being coincides with the process of "commoning" (Subirats, 2013). This process involves the creation of new institutional frameworks for new models of distributing material or immaterial resources. Moreover, it opens the space that enables the emergence of new subjectivities in the public sphere (Shortall, 2013). As we delve deeper into the concept of public action, we realize that activating new subjectivities is inextricably linked to acknowledging and integrating various knowledge perspectives (Cefai, 2017). In other words, to transform society, it is essential to recognize the contested nature of knowledge and the power dynamics that come into play within this transformation context (Shortall, 2013). By embracing diverse viewpoints and engaging in constructive dialogues, public action can potentiate positive change while fostering an inclusive and equitable culture (Norman-Major, 2022).

3. Methodology

Regarding methodology, the research is a single qualitative case study (Gerring, 2007; Stake, 1995), and the research paradigm is interpretative-inductive (González Monteagudo, 2001). Thus the case study aimed to address in-depth the formation and action of a group of family farmers, analysing complexities and contradictions that permeate this atypical and paradigmatic (Stake, 1995; Flyvbjerg, 2006) case in São Paulo's region. The case of COOPERCENTRAL VR was chosen due to its ability to provide insights on the creation of agency in collective environments, through intense observation and mutual learning between researchers and the object under investigation (Ibid.). Also, because COOPERCENTRAL VR is a case of success, with a huge number of people impacted and united to make it possible a stronger representation, advocacy and production of a family farmers collective. Therefore, this article was built through a narrative strategy (Langley, 1999) based on an extensive collection of information, data and stories. It is precisely through the narrative element that this case sought to expose a problem rich in contradictions, which allows the construction of knowledge. For Flyvbjerg (2006), "the case story is itself the result" (p.238).

The initial question that based this investigation is: How could collaborative strategies increase the influence of local actors in the public agenda? In this sense, we sought to understand the motivations, the implications and the actions done by the central cooperative

to generate explanatory variables within a specific context that could then be extrapolated and transferred to other contexts (González Monteagudo, 2001). For this, 58 semi-structured interviews were conducted with cooperative farmers and government actors between 2016 and 2020. In addition, public documents and documents of the cooperative itself and the individual cooperatives, that form part of the regional collective, were also analysed.

This article has been built from other investigations made with COOPERCENTRAL VR over the years (Barp, 2020; Barp et al., 2023; Grigoletto, 2018; Momesso, 2020; Momesso et al., 2023), and also a partnership relationship that continues to exist between researchers and the organization. Even today, researchers have contact with the cooperative and farmers, performing other activities together. We are talking about an engagement relationship between researchers and farmers, which has developed over a long period and is expressed in this article. According to the trajectory described, we can establish slow or long-term research.

The objective of this article is to present a narrative of how this organizational and governance model was built, its motivations, its dilemmas, and its implications, also how this whole construction process made it possible for the family farmers of Vale do Ribeira (SP) to influence the local and regional political agenda. That is, how the path was built and how this ride allowed these farmers to become political actors. To make this narrative strategy more transparent and understandable, we employed a specific analytical framework:

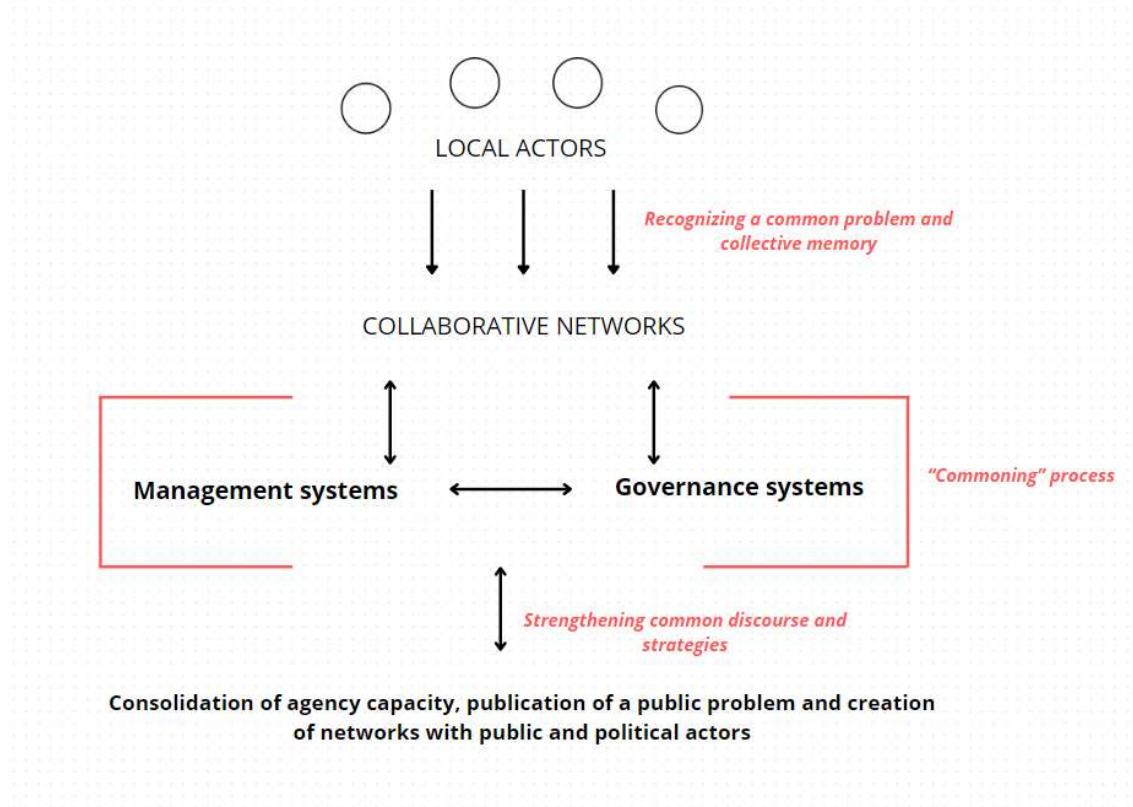


Fig 1. Analytical Framework. Source: prepared by the authors.

Regarding methodological limitations, it is believed that not all knowledge construction involves the process of generalization (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Therefore, it is worth noting that the objective of this article is to deepen into and build context-dependent knowledge. However, it opens a path for future research to analyse other cases using the same analytical framework. Also, an intriguing research path that remains open for further investigation is the consolidation of quantitative analyses that could complement the narrative, providing additional insights and expanding theory construction.

4. Results analysis

4.1 Recognizing each other as a collective and working together

The case analysed is the activity of the Central Cooperative of Rural Producers and Family Farming of Vale do Ribeira - COOPERCENTRAL VR, a solidarity economy-based movement and initiative created in 2017. It is a production cooperative that reunites twelve affiliated organizations in Vale do Ribeira and encompasses about 1200 families, along with settlers and quilombolas communities. Despite its consolidation in 2017, different singular cooperatives have already done cooperative work since the 1990's in different regional cities. Currently, COOPERCENTRAL VR primarily specializes in bananas and primarily sells to the public market

for food procurement programs aimed at school feeding. Nevertheless, the cooperative also offers various other products, and there is currently a movement underway to enhance techniques such as agroforestry and reduce the use of chemical products.

Before the regional collective work, through COOPERCENTRAL VR, the different unique cooperatives competed for access to the public market, and there was significant mistrust among farmers. However, they faced the same difficulties. The first significant difficulty faced by family farmers was the low price of their products resulting from the sale to intermediaries, which meant a sale for a meagre price, and often even the difficulty of maintaining their production. In addition, operationalizing logistics for sale in the public market was also a big challenge due to a lack of infrastructure, a lack of knowledge about processes for accessing the public market, and due to the intense competition between the different singular cooperatives. So, the joint effort became possible only after the initial stages of building trust relationships and establishing a common subjectivity and shared meanings. Furthermore, it stemmed from the farmers' acknowledgment that they were encountering similar problems and that through collective action, they could more easily overcome these challenges. This process aligns with Cefai's (2017) perspective on initiating public action. According to the author, an essential part of constructing this action is precisely recognizing a collective problem. Therefore, this process was an important part of enabling family farmers to gain agency collectively (Cefai, 2017; Esteves et al., 2021).

Regarding material outcomes, creating a regional cooperative represented more significant economic and infrastructure gains for producers: the end of sales to intermediaries, the possibility of sharing costs, materials and knowledge, and the possibility of accessing the public market more strategically. Also, working together represented subjectivity gains (Shortall, 2013; Norman-Major, 2022). Therefore, COOPERCENTRAL's work presents two significant paths. The first involves the management of resources and materials. Through collective management and self-management processes, farmers increased their economic gains, production capacity and delivery capabilities. The second involves governance work, changing power relations, creating new subjectivities and enhancing the agency of family farmers (Cefai, 2017; Shortall, 2013). Consequently, what makes COOPERCENTRAL a case to be analyzed is to understand how their governance and management models enabled family farmers to position themselves as local and regional political actores, pressuring and influencing political decisions and public policies, within the cities and Sao Paulo's state.

The upcoming sessions are dedicated to understanding how strengthening the agency of family farmers as political actors was enabled through the use of different dynamics and instruments of management, discussion persuasion, among others (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012) within COOPERCENTRAL VR consolidation. Firstly, on an internal level. Secondly, on an external level, dealing with local and regional governments.

4.2 Strengthening political capacities through a model of resource management and governance

Unlike what is expected to happen when operations of different singular cooperatives come together, COOPERCENTRAL VR chose to work to maintain the independence of each of the unique associations and cooperatives that are part of the regional collective. Therefore, cooperatives and associations that are part of the central maintain their contracts and manage their finances independently. In addition, each singular cooperative is free to organize itself in its own way; therefore, their internal management dynamics are at their own charge. The function of the regional cooperative is to operationalize the delivery logistics to schools jointly and organize the cooperatives that would compete in each public call. This arrangement aligns with Salamon's (2001) view of a network, where despite not losing the individuality of each of the present agents, competitive relationships are replaced by relationships of trust, guaranteeing a governance model that reinforces individual subjectivities (members of the singular local cooperatives) while creating a new form of subjectivity, connected to COOPERCENTRAL VR.

Allowing cooperatives and associations already selling to municipalities to continue doing so was a strategic decision to ensure consistency in the supply chain and prevent localities from being left without a supplier. It was also a fair approach to support the cooperatives and associations and the communities they serve, particularly during times of economic uncertainty. Besides, new cities' contracts would be redistributed, prioritizing those bases in disadvantaged situations regarding access to the institutional market. For the family farmers, this is a way to promote a more significant redistribution of income and opportunities in the territory. In addition, internally, they work with what they call an "open spreadsheet." This means that all cooperative members have access to the cooperative's financial data and thus can monitor all the activities that have been carried out. This is a way of working in a more horizontal perspective, and to challenge the power relationships that exist within the singular cooperatives, creating a "commoning" process of the public call access and of the COOPERCENTRAL VR management itself (Massimo & Havie, 2014; Subirats, 2013). Furthermore, there is a process of "commoning" knowledge being built because singular cooperatives that couldn't access public calls due to a lack of expertise are now learning how to do it.

Working in this way, the cooperative overcame the mistrust among farmers before the beginning of regional work with COOPERCENTRAL VR. In addition, all the directors of COOPERCENTRAL VR are family farmers as well and working with the "open spreadsheet" system allows those family producers who are not necessarily linked to the management of the cooperative to approach the discussions at a strategic level. That is why meetings are constantly promoted, within the singular and also at the regional level and for the discussion of operational themes. However, there are also discussions around the theme of Social and

Solidarity Economy, organic and regenerative forms of production, as is the case of agroforestry production, and also on youth related activities of the territory and rural development. Therefore, the activities promoted by the central cooperative go beyond the issue of resource management; they also encompass strengthening the agency capacity of farmers and the creation of subjectivities and ideas that enable the empowerment of these individuals through environment discussions and knowledge construction (Esteves et al., 2021; Norman-Major, 2022; Shortall, 2013).

The role of the central cooperative is to articulate the interests and possibilities between the individual cooperatives, creating a space for concentration on a given territorial basis. This way of working enables more significant equity between producers and greater protagonism of the singular cooperatives. In addition, it is also a space where farmers come to better understand their rights and the existing public policies in support of family farmers. Also, the central cooperative, through capacity and subjectivity building, and learning tools, consolidates itself as a space where these farmers build their self-esteem and the possibility of being protagonists in this process. Therefore, constructing a collective memory and subjectivities (Shortall, 2013) around the theme of Social and Solidarity Economy, the existing practices within the territory, and the common difficulties faced by these farmers was the gateway to collaborative work (Cefai, 2017). From this point onwards, the use of different horizontal management tools and governance mechanisms that encourage the empowerment and agency of these actors strengthened their capacity to play a leading role in advocating for their interests (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012).

This section focused on how the cooperative operates at an internal level and how it ensures gains of agency for family farmers, in addition to economic benefits derived from jointly conducted activities. COOPERCENTRAL VR can indeed be seen as a form of "commoning," representing a process of constructing an economic and social alternative for family farmers in the Vale do Ribeira, "claiming ownership of the conditions needed for life and its reproduction" (Massimo & Haive, 2014, p. 291). The process of transforming these local actors, who initially worked in a scattered and competitive manner, into a collective has been and continues to be a gradual process. Initially, this collective work began by creating a shared purpose, a collective memory, and a collectively managed model of infrastructure and logistics capable of addressing their most pressing needs (Cefai, 2017): the lack of funds, infrastructure, and difficulties in accessing public procurement markets. However, an important part of COOPERCENTRAL VR's work lies in becoming a significant instrument through which these actors engage differently with local and regional government authorities. Therefore, the next section is dedicated to further exploring this relationship and how these political actors have become capable of influencing the public agenda.

4.3 Strengthening representativeness and a new political praxis

Through the collective organization and the consolidation of COOPERCENTRAL VR, farmers became actors able to demand initiatives from the public authorities to promote productive activity and improve the quality of services in rural areas. The collective representation of the demands of the rural producer enabled greater collaboration between government and civil society, producing results and policies to strengthen productive activity in the field. Much of this articulation between the public authorities and rural producers was initiated by acting in the Municipal Councils of Rural Development (CMDR), which became essential spaces for political action. Family farmers' participation in decision-making spaces breaks away from the logic that the State is the sole entity constructing and implementing public policies (Spink, 2019). On the contrary, involving social actors in formulating policies that better address the social and economic needs of the population holds great potential for the Vale do Ribeira territory (Ostrom et al., 1999; Ostrom, 2002). To achieve this, local authorities and family farmers are creating new governance systems that are more horizontal and involve many actors (Brugué et al., 2013; Mendell & Alain, 2015; Salamon, 2001).

A striking example of this action is the policy of granting the use of agricultural equipment in one of the cities represented by the regional cooperative. This policy was built between producers and local governments in order to better distribute the use of agricultural equipment in the territory. Granting equipment to cooperatives was an exciting way to enable the proper use of machinery and equipment, which were underused by the city hall, in addition to increasing the level and quality of banana production in the region. In this agreement, cooperatives have the right to use these equipment for years as long as they commit to defray the maintenance of the machines, a mechanism based on establishing use assignment contracts. The management of these, previously handled by the municipality, is now carried out by each of the city's cooperatives, allowing access to more producers. This aligns with what the literature advocates for collective solutions that prove to be more efficient, including reorganizing available resources, such as equipment, as Cefai (2017) mentioned. The possibility of the participation of family farmers in these councils is an example of how collective work enables them to be part of political discussions and the construction of local public policies.

CMDRs have become important spaces for the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Through these councils, new producers also began to network and strengthen the representation of the interests of the class. On the one hand, new producers and cooperatives are informed about their rights, new public programs, and new technologies. On the other hand, field life is also discussed in general, and this allows the creation of new subjectivities and changes in paradigms within the public sector as well. Through constructive dialogue, positive changes are being fostered in the region (Norman-Major, 2022). With this, cooperatives begin to assume the role of articulating demands on rural transport, education, health, and infrastructure (such as light and internet) to areas far from the urban perimeter. The councils are important spaces for publicizing the issues recognized by family farmers; in

these spaces, some of the problems acknowledged by the collective also become recognized by authorities and society (Cefai, 2017). This is because, through persuasive instruments, interest mediation and the coordination of different actors, rural producers can legitimize their interests in the face of local government (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012). However, not all cities have an active CMDR, so this is one of the plans for the COOPERCENTRAL VR singular cooperatives. More than that, there is a plan to strengthen a regional CMDR capable of covering different cities in Vale do Ribeira.

Regarding the influence exerted beyond the limits of the territory, the representation exercised by COOPERCENTRAL VR in front of the state power has been vital for the expansion and consolidation of the National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) in the state of São Paulo. Despite the legal requirement that a portion of the school meal should be sourced from family farming, not all municipalities adhere to it. Therefore, the rural producers from COOPERCENTRAL VR use the strategy of providing information to various technicians and policy-makers about the program's situation and the situation of family farmers in the Vale do Ribeira as a persuasive strategy (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012). The farmers pointed out that there were several conversations between the leaders of the cooperative and government authorities as a way to pressure compliance with PNAE legislation (Federal Law 11.947/2009, with a requirement of 30% of the value purchased to be provided by family farmers and traditional populations). More than that, awareness-raising activities were also carried out with schools, directly with those responsible for school meals. The process was due to the explanation of the entire chain behind a specific product and that purchase from family farmers also contributes to reducing waste; improving rural development and environmental preservation, and increasing the income of countless families. This enables the construction of a more equitable and inclusive culture between public agents and local actors (Norman-Major, 2022). This is another example of how the collective action from family farmers enabled them to have representativeness and capacity to advocate their rights and necessities for regional spheres of government.

Another vital role of COOPERCENTRALVR is given in the councils of the state of São Paulo and the city of São Paulo (state capital), since the network of schools in the capital is the primary consumer of the cooperative. Among them are the Municipal Council of Food and Nutrition Security - COMUSAN, the Municipal Council of School Feeding - CAE, and the Management Commission of Organic Law. Participation in these councils influenced the decline of public procurement in the city of São Paulo after the city hall management change in 2018. This episode is especially relevant when thinking about the strategic capacity and public action of the central cooperative, given that, in addition to the councils, other public actors were involved in the case: local governments, councilors and state representatives. The episode highlights the capacity of governance and negotiation of COOPERCENTRAL VR, articulating different levels of government and actors. This can be seen as a strategy of multilevel governance (Brugué et al., 2013) and collaborative governance (Salamon, 2001), where family farmers use their agency and public action instruments to inform, persuade and engage in

discussions with various actors in the public sphere about issues that affect them and to create potential collective solutions.

The political and representative role of the central cooperative ensures more articulation with the public power, creating spaces for debate and better organizing social demands (Ostrom, 2002; Norman-Major, 2022). Joint work also amplified the recognition of these actors regarding their ability to collectively influence the public sphere and take a leading role in bringing about changes in their own reality (Cefai, 2017). COOPERCENTRAL VR became more than a resource management tool; it became an important governance tool among local and regional actors (Brugué et al. 2013; Salamon, 2001). Through persuasive tools, pressure, dialogue, and the creation of consensus (Lascoumes & Wales, 2012), family farmers could represent their demands to the public authorities. Therefore, a fundamental part of the transformation of these local actors into political agents occurs precisely through the construction of new subjectivities, the dynamics of dialogue and persuasion, and the change in power relations promoted by collective work.

5. Conclusion

This article sought to analyze how the collective organization of family farmers within a regional cooperative, COOPERCENTRAL VR, enabled their political agency and their influence in the local and regional public agenda. The concept of commons and commoning help to understand the regional cooperative activities, which is not merely a resource management model but rather a process of constructing alternatives aspired to the production and reproduction of life through more horizontal and participatory logic (Massimo & Havie, 2014; Subirats, 2013). So, through collective action, including the Social Solidarity Economy scope, local actors are strengthening their capacity for agency and leadership, and enhancing the development of collective instruments and strategies to address the growing economic, social, and environmental issues.

Although material difficulties may be the initial impulse for the construction of collective work, it is through the consolidation of the common memory, dialogical processes, and shared subjectivities that dispersed actors can recognize themselves as a collective. From the recognition of a collective that shares challenges and seeks solutions, actors can mobilize tools for the publicization of their problems. Processes of horizontal management, governance, questioning power relations, knowledge exchange, individual and collective empowerment, and the construction of trust relationships ultimately culminate in creating a common discourse and practice. In this way, collective initiatives have the potential to constitute collective agency from subjectivities formed in the context of everyday organizational life through management and governance mechanisms.

The strengthening of this agency capacity allows the collective to involve other governmental and non-governmental actors in building solutions and publicizing the collective problem to

bring it into the public agenda. Thus, multi-level and collaborative governance networks are created, where actors use different instruments of persuasion, dialogue, and convincing. Finally, these dynamics benefit the process of a paradigm shift and the creation of new subjectivities in the public sphere, capable of promoting positive changes and a more inclusive culture.

Our main contribution was to develop an analytical model encapsulating how public action transforms modern commons. This approach demands reconfiguring institutional and organizational structures and aligning with the ethos of "commoning." It requires embracing diverse knowledge perspectives and fostering inclusive and constructive dialogues incorporating various viewpoints. By doing so, public action becomes a potent force for positive change and cultivates an environment of equity and inclusivity. The COOPERCENTRAL VR exemplifies a commitment to social protagonism, becoming a dynamic agent in pursuing greater collective well-being in the social solidarity economy.

Furthermore, the performance of COOPERCENTRAL brings some lessons and policy advice. First, creating subjectivities and everyday discourse is fundamental to transforming local actors into political actors. Secondly, the valorisation of interdependence relationships and the protagonism of these actors within cooperatives are essential to constructing their agency. Finally, creating spaces for dialogue between the public sector and these movements is where the construction of new subjectivities in the public sphere has great potential to occur. Through strategies of pressure, listening to different perspectives, and dialogue, new and more horizontal decisions are made regarding the collective construction of responses to public problems. However, this is a case study and there are limitations to generalizing the inferences. It opens a path for new investigations that might discuss the implications of these findings for cooperatives in different contexts or scales. Also, there is space for further investigations to explore deeper the political dynamic in cooperative networks.

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