

# COOP AND MEMBER PARTICIPATION IN THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING: *Reality and motivation*

*Please do not diffuse and quote without the author's permission*

Scientific coordinator: *Carlo Borzaga*

Researcher:

*Sara Depedri*

*Michele Boglioni*

*Chiara Carini*

*Beatrice Valline*

*Partner:* Associazione Nazionale Cooperative Consumatori - Coop



# **COOP AND MEMBER PARTICIPATION IN THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING: Reality and motivation**

Sara Depedri<sup>1</sup>

Collaborators to the investigation and in writing some part of the report:  
Michele Boglioni<sup>2</sup>, Chiara Carini<sup>3</sup>, Beatrice Valline<sup>4</sup>

## **Abstract**

This report presents the results of a survey conducted in 2011 among a representative sample of consumer cooperatives participating in the ANCC-Coop system. The research objective was to interview elected volunteers members of Coop, an important figure in the Coop system both from a quantitative and from a qualitative point of view, since it represents the linkage between citizenship and decision-making bodies of the cooperative, but also between the mutual nature of the cooperative and the members' interest on the one hand and the social soul of the cooperative on the other side. The research, through a structured questionnaire, collected data on 663 volunteer members, investigating motivations, perceptions of the cooperative, participation and psychological values. The reading of data was accompanied with the analysis of the policies pursued in the cooperatives thanks to interviews to the social leaders of medium and large cooperatives adhering to ANCC-COOP.

---

<sup>1</sup> Euricse, Trento.

<sup>2</sup> Euricse, Trento.

<sup>3</sup> Euricse, Trento.

<sup>4</sup> Euricse, Trento.

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

### CHAPTER I - COOP AND VOLUNTEERING

1. The Coop system
2. The concept of participation at Coop
  - 2.1 *Member participation as owners: some data*
  - 2.2 *Member participation and volunteering: two different concepts at Coop*
3. Coop's volunteer-members: numbers
4. Volunteer member involvement: organization and policies
  - 4.1 *Strong and weak points of the models adopted*
  - 4.2 *Policies towards volunteer members*
  - 4.3 *Objectives of social activities and opportunities for member involvement*
  - 4.4 *Initiatives implemented, results obtained and critical points*
  - 4.5 *Distinguishing characteristics of each cooperative and comparative advantages*

### CHAPTER II - THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

1. The theory of participation in corporate governance
2. The theory of motivational complexity

### CHAPTER III - ANALYTICAL PREMISES OF THE RESEARCH

1. Which research tool and how to build it?
2. Is this a good questionnaire?

### CHAPTER IV - EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS ON ELECTED VOLUNTEER MEMBERS AND RESULTS

1. The sample
2. The nature of the relationship with the cooperative
3. Member motivation
4. Member participation at Coop
5. Satisfaction and organizational commitment
6. Coop's policies: critical points

### CHAPTER V - COOP'S ELECTED VOLUNTEER MEMBERS: OPINIONS OF THE HEADS OF THE MEMBER POLICY SECTOR

1. Current (and past) Coop volunteer members
  - 1.1 *Why have volunteers at Coop? Strong and weak points*
  - 1.2 *What type of relations exist between volunteer members and Coop's mission?*
  - 1.3 *Volunteer members influence in Coop's governance*
  - 1.4 *What type of relations exist between volunteers and workers? The presence of conflicts*
  - 1.5 *How can volunteer members be enhanced and motivated? Cooperative initiatives*
2. Coop's future volunteer member
  - 2.1 *Coop without volunteer members? Possible alternative organizational scenarios*
  - 2.2 *Coop's ideal profile of the volunteer member*
  - 2.3 *The future of volunteering at Coop*
3. Conclusive reflections

## CONCLUSIONS

## INTRODUCTION

During 2011, Euricse (European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises) collaborated with the *Associazione Nazionale Cooperative di Consumatori* (National Association of Consumer Cooperatives) ANCC-Coop with the purpose of conducting research on a representative sample of volunteer members currently active in the national Coop system. The interest in the research is based on the fact that volunteering represents within Coop an evident indicator of member participation as well as an element having distinctive characteristics. First of all, the total number of volunteers involved in the cooperatives that are ANCC members is very high and characterized by a rather steady presence, leading to affirm that this is a well-consolidated phenomenon and that for some time has represented an added value for these organizations. Moreover, it is interesting to observe the presence of volunteers (specifically, of volunteer members) in a sector of activity that is not strictly socially relevant: it is clearly based on the national data on volunteering where the presence of non-remunerated workers almost exclusively characterizes organizations that are active in the sector of collective and social interest services in which corporate giving is part of the organization's explicit social mission.

What are the motivations that prompt individuals to become members of a consumer cooperative and join Coop's member and solidarity projects? This research has the specific objective of studying the motivations underlying member participation and the commitment of volunteer members through a complex empirical research, while also attempting a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of volunteering and member participation.

In order to create a complete and sufficiently clear picture, it is firstly essential to quantify the presence of volunteer members as it has been more than twenty years since the last research was conducted on membership (dating back to 1988). The research must then define the trend and help the understanding of the socio-demographic characteristics and commitment in the cooperative of volunteer members. These aspects will be discussed in Chapter 1 of this report. Once the overall reality will be represented of member participation and volunteering in the cooperatives belonging to the ANCC-Coop, Chapter 2 will then explain the approach that researchers wished to follow in defining the research tools. It is also essential to understand from a theoretical point of view the basis on which the study of motivations is founded, providing explicit definitions of the various motivational aspects and reflecting on the research methods. In particular, the research is based on two levels of data collection and information: one research phase was addressed to the heads of the social policies of the large and of some medium sized cooperatives and another phase was based on submitting and processing questionnaires to a representative group of volunteer-members appointed by Coop. With regard to the interviews with the heads of member policies, these allowed reflecting on the cooperative's organizational structure at the territorial level, on the policies implemented for attracting, selecting, motivating and involving volunteer members, on the feelings of the heads of member policies with respect to the advantages and limits of the current volunteer members presence. The interviews were based on different topics and some excerpts will be presented in different points of this report to provide the reader with a vision that is not only objective, but also based on a subjective perception of various topics (from defining volunteering and member participation to cooperative structure). The salient reflections on organizational policies will be presented in Chapter 5. The research on volunteer members that represents the core of this research since it meets the primary objective of identifying their motivations and perceptions, is presented first in Chapter 3 that discusses analysis objectives and

methods, and later in Chapter 4 that illustrates the sample analyzed and the research's results. This part will allow a more timely assessment of the activities carried out by the volunteer members, their levels of active participation and relations with Coop, their objectives as volunteer members, judgments on the structure in which they operate, the goods and services they produce and the incentives obtained.

The empirical analysis was organized so as to consider the specific quality of member participation in Coop, starting from the fact that this is manifested in voluntary, spontaneous and non-economically motivated action and that such active participation also has important consequences not only on consumers, but also on the overall territory. The results that will be presented in this report will allow not only to have a clearly identified picture of the volunteer members, but also to highlight criticalities and positive aspects of member participation and of the relationship between Coop and its volunteer members. On the basis of these observations, modalities will be proposed for using the data for communicating both externally and internally the cooperative's capability for promoting member participation and for attracting important human resources for intermediation with customers and for defining adequate policies for enhancing this valuable asset.

Since this report is the fruit of a project created in collaboration with the ANCC's Member Policy Sector, the curators of the research wish to express their thanks to Carmela Favarulo, with whom from the very beginning a productive collaboration was established on research objectives and modalities and who provided researchers with precious comments on the questionnaires and coordinated data collection. Special thanks also goes to Claudio Toso and Sinibaldo Vidibene for the first comments on the report. Lastly, a special thanks also to the heads of the member policy sector of the cooperatives for the interesting information provided during the interviews and for the improvements proposed for the research tools and to their collaborators that managed the phase of submitting and collecting the questionnaires.

## CHAPTER I

### COOP AND VOLUNTEERING<sup>5</sup>

A prerequisite for understanding the sense of volunteering at Coop and the capability of these cooperatives for mobilizing human resources with altruistic objectives is that of comprehending who are the two main players that we are analyzing: Coop, in its system and its objectives, and the volunteer members in their role and specific characteristics. In detail, to understand Coop, it is first of all necessary to examine its territorial presence to comprehend the widespread phenomenon and the organization's territorial rooting. For this purpose, even a brief consideration of Coop's objectives and characteristics as well as of its management will allow explaining the presence of volunteers in organizations established as consumer cooperatives. On the other hand, to understand the role of volunteering in any type of economic system, it is useful to provide a definition that allows verifying in detail who are Coop's volunteers.

#### 1. The Coop system<sup>6</sup>

Coop is a complex system formed by consumer cooperatives and consortia. It groups 115 cooperatives, present in 17 Italian regions, divided into small, medium and large cooperatives based on the numbers of stores and on the multi-channelling characteristics of the cooperatives. In total, there are 1,444 stores divided into supermarkets, hypermarkets and discounts.

At the national level, all the cooperatives of the Coop system are members of Legacoop, the representational body joined by over 15,000 Italian cooperatives from all sectors.

All 115 Coop cooperatives are members of ANCC, National Association of Consumer Cooperatives, that carries out the role of strategic and program management of the Coop system, coordinating national policies. ANCC-Coop is territorially subdivided into three associations that politically and institutionally deal with the communities and local institutions: Adriatic District, Tyrrhenian District and North-West District.

The following are also part of Coop's system:

- *Coop Italia* is the national marketing centre where the system's commercial policies are drafted, developed and implemented;
- the *Consorzio Nazionale Non Alimentari* (C.N.N.A.) (National Non-Food Consortium) represents the national logistics center for non-food products;
- two Consortiums/Marketing Centers - i.e., Adriatic Center and Nordovest Consortium - draft the guidelines for entrepreneurial integration processes;
- the Inres Consortium provides planning and building stores;
- the Coop School works for spreading cooperative culture starting from members and workers.

Coop's complex system, that is briefly illustrated, is at the service of nearly 7 million and a half members and of the 115 cooperatives present across the national territory. These are concentrated in the 9 major cooperatives that operate throughout the national territory and that have a total of 6,841,552 members, equal to 92.1% of the total. The size based on the number of members also explains the different size according to the number of employees, since the employees of the nine major cooperatives represent nearly 90% of the total of the system's employees. The impact of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Chapter edited by Michele Boglioni and Beatrice Valline.

<sup>6</sup> Data reported and partially re-processed that are presented in this paragraph was collected from the 2010 Seventh Social Report of Coop Consumer Cooperation.

small cooperatives is however significant in terms of territorial dispersion and therefore represents a resource for the system insofar as it guarantees Coop's presence across the territory and meets specific territorial needs through its 92 cooperatives and its 155 stores.

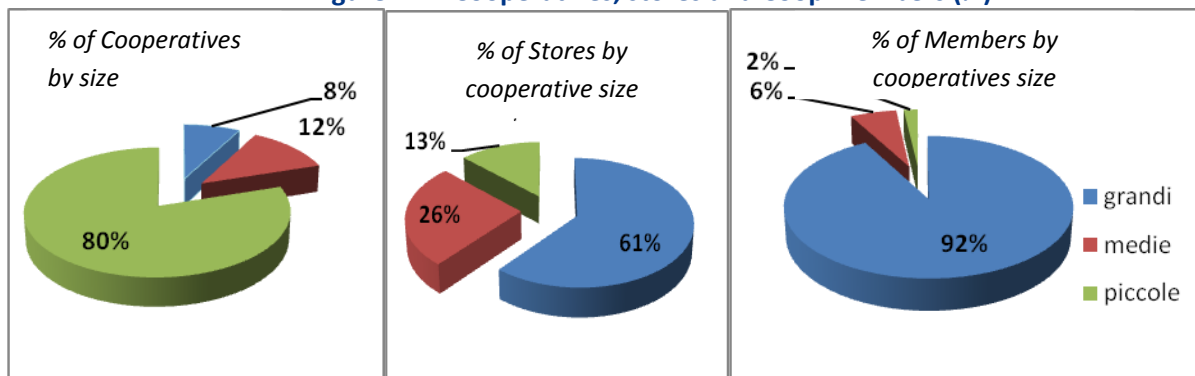
**Tabella 1.1 - The cooperatives of the Coop Consortium (Absolute figures 2010)**

Consumer cooperatives	No of coops	Stores (hypermarkets, supermarkets, discounts)		Members as of 31/12/2010	Employees
		No.	Stores per coop		
Large	9	734	From 38 to 160 on a national scale	6,841,552	47,627
Medium	14	314	From 7 to 50 on a provincial or interprovincial scale	451,344	4,622
Small	92	155	From 1 to 8	136,951	1,011
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>1,203</b>		<b>7,429,847</b>	<b>53,260</b>

Source: our processing of Coop data.

80% are small cooperatives, having a limited number of stores locally (one or two). 12.2% are medium cooperatives operating on a provincial or inter-provincial scale with a maximum of 50 stores per cooperative, while 7.8% are large cooperatives operating on a national scale with a maximum of 160 stores per cooperative.

**Figure 1.1 - Cooperatives, stores and Coop members (%)**



Source: our elaboration from Coop data

Despite the size difference of the cooperatives belonging to ANCC-Coop, they all present common characteristics both for internal organization and activities implemented as well as, above all, for objectives pursuant to their articles of association that are inspired on cooperative principles. Even though these aspects will be further analyzed in the subsequent chapters, it is useful to mention that being a consumer cooperative means above all complying with certain guidelines that are well-described and detailed even in the cooperative articles of association and based on the 7 cooperative principles described by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA): non-remunerated and voluntary membership, democratic control by members, economic participation of members, cooperative autonomy and independence, education, training and information, cooperation among cooperatives, interest toward the community.

Even the organizational mission is well-defined and detailed essentially by: 1) a social function for consumer protection, implemented by providing members with the most affordable products and services, safe and suitable for their satisfaction that meet a specific demand; 2) cooperative

democracy, supported on one hand by policies for participation in social life and by cultural and recreational services to members and, on the other, by appropriate re-investment policies of part of the profits for the cooperative's activities and assets; 3) supporting member education, not only for consumption, but also for saving and awareness; 4) enhancing work and the commitment of employees and of volunteer members; 5) implementing activities that lead to developing and innovating the cooperative, jointly acting to improve the entire system; 6) developing the altruistic and human aspect, being open to promoting solidarity activities with other associations and cooperatives and to activities in support of needy people and countries; 7) strengthening the role of the cooperative movement and its values.

These characteristics underlie the cooperative activities and their management in explaining and strengthening the sense of member participation and the presence of volunteer members. It is necessary to reflect on these elements asking oneself what does member participation mean at Coop and what does it mean to be a volunteer member at Coop.

## **2. The concept of participation at Coop**

Participation is critical for Coop in carrying out all its activities determining the changes in direction and future visions. In 2008, as part of the 7<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of the member sections, this topic was seriously examined and a series of important changes were implemented regarding the ownership structure, particularly member participation modalities in the cooperative's life.

Member participation is manifested through volunteering that is spontaneous and non-economically motivated, having important consequences not only for consumers, but for the entire territory. Member participation is a way of expressing an organization's democracy. For a cooperative, its value is even more important and means allowing the member to actively collaborate with the cooperative for bringing forth the mission for which it was formed.

The Coop system divided member participation into five sub-groups: economic, ownership, governance, services and social. Let's examine in detail the various aspects of member participation:

- economic participation is intended as a possibility for members to purchase cooperative products and services according to the mutuality principle;
- member participation as owners occurs through the possibility of participating in the meetings according to the principle "one head one vote", independently of the economic value of the shareholding in the corporate capital. In order to guarantee a high level of member participation in meetings, Coop believes the possibility is crucial, as envisaged by the Civil Code, to hold separate meetings, in addition to the general one;
- member participation in governance is the possibility of actively being part of the Coop's system, administrative and decision-making processes. Two types of governance currently exist that the cooperatives can join: the monistic one and the dual one. In the monistic one the members join the Board of Directors. In the dual one, introduced in 2008, two bodies coexist: the Supervisory Body and the Management Body. The first one, formed by members, carries out control functions over the second one, formed by cooperative managers;
- participation in services is based on member involvement for improving cooperative stores, both commercially and socially, so that the member is actually at the center of cooperative choices. This occurs by listening to members and by firmly implementing the initiatives proposed and deemed important;



- lastly, Coop social participation represents an activity in which both the member and the cooperative provide energy and resources for implementing social utility goals. In this activity, a fundamental role is played by volunteers, namely, all those people that are present on a non-remunerated basis at Coop for spreading principles and values.

If all the aspects in which member participation is carried out at Coop are essential owing to their significant contribution in defining belonging to the organization as a whole, it is also true that the two of the levels of member participation described are particularly important for defining the volunteer's role within the cooperative: member participation as owners and social participation.

### *2.1 Member participation as owners: some data*

Member participation in the cooperative life through meetings is often commonly considered only as an occasion in which cooperative performance is controlled by the members, with the formal presentation and approval of the financial statements. This vision, however, is quite limited and member participation in meetings must certainly be seen as the first index of member sense of belonging to the organization.

For Coop, meetings are considered essential and involve resources and energy, both centrally and for each individual cooperative and member section. Meetings are typically structured as a general ordinary meeting and as previously mentioned, also as separate meetings that allow reaching all the territory where cooperatives are present. Specific information was collected on member participation from the 9 major cooperatives by interviewing the heads of the member policy sectors to understand incentives for participation that are promoted in each cooperative.

From the quantitative point of view, data revealed that in 2010, 549 separate meetings were expected and actually summoned, in which 114,400 members participated. As percentages of the total of members, these figures are not particularly high: the average data is approximately 2% and with no major differences among cooperatives. Nonetheless, the positive value of this phenomenon is indisputable since it succeeds in involving a "small city" of consumer members interested in the future of their cooperative and generally, of Coop.

The frequency of the meeting varies considerably: according to the statements made by the interviews with the heads of the 9 major cooperatives and for a representation sample of the medium-sized ones,<sup>7</sup> a little over half of the member sections holds an average of one meeting a year. One fourth holds 2 meetings and the remaining one fourth, 3 and more.

At the qualitative level, one of the clear and priority objectives that the member policy sector of each cooperative sets for itself is certainly increasing active member participation. At the territorial level, each member section has a series of tools available that include store information, distribution of periodicals, email communication and event organization. Economic incentives and training are less used: a few cooperatives stated they offer purchase coupons or gadgets to the members participating in the meetings, other cooperatives hold specific training courses for promoting member participation. In any case, as we will have the opportunity to further examine, member participation in meetings is created gradually with knowledge and trust in the organization and does not respond much to incentives or ad hoc training.

---

<sup>7</sup> See the sample of cooperatives analyzed presented in the following paragraph.

This data was further analyzed thanks to interviews with the heads of the member policy sector of the large/medium sized cooperatives.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that 4 out of the 12 cooperative heads interviewed stated they are dissatisfied with member participation from a quantitative point of view since it equals only 1% or lower of the total members. In other 4 cases, the trend is unvaried or slightly lower, but does not create particular concern. Lastly, in 3 cases, a satisfactory level of participation was recorded, actually increasing in the last year. This was due to a particular effort made by the management, aiming at using new forms of communication such as custom-tailored letters (a method used elsewhere for some time) or marketing techniques such as including information on receipts. Moreover, cooperatives often broadened the number of meetings to better meet the different needs of volunteers. It was also noted that it is necessary to distinguish between institutional tasks and social activities. The first were seen as drawing less attention since “traditional member participation has nearly disappeared” and for solving this problem, one particular cooperative uses powerpoint presentations for making these meetings more interesting and is preparing a video for the next meetings. Other methods include using sms and the internet. The greatest problems arise in those situations where the member does not feel he is a main player.

In any case, communication is the key for effective member participation. Material incentives are broadly used, but no one really gives this any importance with the exception of situations where purchase coupons and small gadgets, such as low energy lights, helped to significantly increase participation.

The question “Do you feel the current structure in terms of bodies and participation modalities should be improved to promote participation also of different people?” was answered positively in one interview. Different forms of communication and the problem regarding youth and/or motivated participation were discussed for “opening windows on the future” and not “closing with the past”. The only other criticism was made regarding the company’s commercial structures that are more difficult to involve, but with regard to external parties, nearly all the cooperatives agreed in stating that the present structures are not the problem. An interview pointed out that

*“Low member participation is a common evil to all associations. The problem of youth involvement is felt by all.”*

This seems to represent the real challenge of our times. Many of those interviewed stated they are not concerned with the number, but with the type of people involved and in particular, with youth participation (as reiterated) and with people that are truly motivated that correspond to Coop’s “ideal profile”.

## *2.2 Member participation and volunteering: two different concepts at Coop*

Social sciences use a rather flexible concept of member participation, associating it or distinguishing it from volunteering with respect to the subject they are examining. This flexibility is criticized as being inexact and as creating confusion regarding the definition. Help in this sense is provided by the Treccani<sup>9</sup> encyclopaedia of social sciences that tried to create a definition by providing a historical context and by further analyzing it.

---

<sup>8</sup> See the reference list in Table 1.2 that follows.

<sup>9</sup> Contribution by Prof. Paolo Ceri, Full Professor of Sociology at the University of Florence

[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/partecipazione-sociale\\_%28Enciclopedia\\_delle\\_Scienze\\_Sociali%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/partecipazione-sociale_%28Enciclopedia_delle_Scienze_Sociali%29/)

By following this structure, the historical roots of member participation must be found within the modern and industrial era, in the gradual expansion and increased autonomy of the private sphere compared to the public one. In particular, the creation of associations led to a new modality of interaction and of regulating interests that was no longer under the control of traditional community structures, such as clans, the Church or local communities, nor under the control of the State or of public associations. This also led to the development of the concept of civil society and of member participation.

From an analytical point of view, “participation is configured [...] as a new opportunity and process of rebuilding on new basis the possibility of acting autonomously (against the hierarchy) while also acting in solidarity (against the market)”. Member participation occurs when both objectives are reached together: the aggregation among individuals – avoiding exclusion and individualism – and the democratic distribution of power – avoiding any type of subordination.

Participation is not only sharing an experience with others – that can range from voluntary participation in an organization to participation in a strike or a web campaign. Participation is not only cooperating, since member participation is not only a type of behaviour (that can be cooperative), but is also an activity that is carried out democratically. Participation is interrelated with sharing and cooperation.

On the basis of these theoretical premises, it is evident that member participation and volunteering cannot and must not be used synonymously. In reality they exist and many strong similarities exist between them. This has been absolutely confirmed also at Coop. Particularly, with the objective of attempting to describe the meaning of participation and of volunteering for Coop, it is necessary to mention a part of the interviews with twelve of the heads of the member policy sectors of the cooperatives belonging to ANCC-Coop, selected on the basis of the national objectives and representation.<sup>10</sup> A preview of these reflections will provide a useful tool in clarifying also the terminology that will be used throughout the report, as well as a way of including member participation into a specific context for analysis.

Most of those interviewed provided a definition of member participation connected with their own cooperative reality that led to the emergence of a general uniformity of contents, also confirming the common objective pursued by Coop throughout the national territory. In particular, the heads of member policy sectors stated that:

*“Participation is sharing in a project, doing something together, being active also for oneself and for others. Member participation is belonging to a group of people that see the cooperative as a useful instrument for improving one’s own quality of life as well as the community’s. Participating in the cooperative, with the cooperative, means knowing the cooperative, expressing one’s opinion and one’s own point of view”.*

*“Member participation is all of the activities that the members of our cooperative carry out for spreading our social and commercial policies”.*

*“It is member participation in the life of their respective Coops that can be expressed in various ways and levels: from shopping in one’s own cooperative to participation in social activities and meetings and board meetings. Or, member participation can be taken to an even higher level by taking on elected representative positions. Member participation in a reality to which one belongs means using services and donating one’s time so that these services can be carried out successfully and also be used by others.”*

*“It is the possibility that members have for contributing towards cooperative choices”.*

*“It is voluntary member participation on general interest topics for building action for the common good”.*

---

<sup>10</sup> Reference should be made to the dedicated chapter for the detailed analysis of results.

*"Those series of activities, actions and projects that are needed to promote a series of policies. [...] A group of actions that attempt involving in a virtuous relation the active members, the associations and the institutions present in a specific territory".*

*"The term participation does not intend an active role, but participating in initiatives organized by others having a social purpose".*

Three of those interviewed contrarily provided a broader definition connected to a more general and sociological concept of member participation:

*"Member participation is joining one's own capabilities and knowledge".*

*"Member participation is the request that many people, groups, organizations and communities bring forth in the most diverse aspects of social life; youth, women, people in general wish to participate as players in the organizations they belong to and in the different aspects of economic, social, political and cultural life where important decisions are made that concern their lives. The majority of people feel they are part of large systems, structures and organizations where they play a determining role or function, without however succeeding in accessing their control or influencing their objectives, operation and global direction".*

*"Member participation is the process of civic participation", namely "individual and collective action planned for identifying and resolving small and large problems that involve community satisfaction".*

Lastly, two of those interviewed defined member participation as a type of corporate activity, respectively affirming:

*"The tool that provides access to a multitude of people in decision-making, strategy and control areas".*

*"The possibility or opportunity for taking action in the cooperative or in its decision-making process".*

In all the 12 interviews, the term volunteer evokes, contrarily, the same image, but differently expressed and articulated: being non-remunerated. Only two of those interviewed directly refer to Coop's members in defining volunteering, one of them highlighting the weak point of Coop's volunteer activities, namely, the difficulty in clarifying objectives that will be discussed later in the dedicated chapter:

*"A volunteer is when he/she donates his time, his intellect and his person for non-profit objectives and for a purpose that is useful to the community or to a specific activity." Volunteering at Coop is somewhat particular: with respect to volunteer associations, there is less clarity as to what is being done.*

*"Volunteering is the member commitment for carrying out solidarity activities and projects".*

The other definitions of volunteering, as mentioned, are very similar among each other and are general, not referred to the cooperative to which members belong. Volunteering is therefore:

*"[...] a question of donating one's time voluntarily based on an autonomous decision to achieve certain objectives".*

*"[...] a non-profit activity that is carried out in one's free time that is strongly voluntary and of benefit to the community".*

*"Free help".*

*"[...] an activity that is carried out freely and 'obviously' for free based on various motivations [...] considered positive by everyone and part of the highly important topic of citizenship, more so than of other significant topics based on solidarity, philanthropy and other more disparate areas [...]. In Italy 'volunteering' is usually considered as an activity carried out by people, often organized, other times not, in a non-remunerated way based on various motivations".*

*"[...] Absolutely non-remunerated activity carried out by people that have the skills and the possibilities of acquiring them".*

*"[...] when a person totally believes in an idea that he is willing to carry out actions to achieve his goal".*

*"Non-remunerated activity that has the objective of pursuing the common good and not exclusively the individual one".*

*"People that are available to others at no cost and that all share a common goal".*

*"A choice based on being available to offer ideas and values one believes in; this along with the fact that a person can firmly contribute to helping others". "Feeling useful for others".*

*"[...] a free and non-profit activity carried out for solidarity and social justice reasons that can be aimed at people in difficult situations, at environmental protection, or other that is created from the spontaneous willingness of citizens to address problems that are unresolved (or not faced) by the government and by the market. For this reason volunteering is part of the 'non-profit sector' together with other organizations that do not comply with to profit logic or to public law".*

By comparing at this point the various opinions on member participation and on volunteering, it is clear how the first is formed by a complex group of resources that also contains volunteering. This is the shared vision of 8 out of 12 heads of the member policy sectors and we can summarize it by saying that:

*"Volunteering can be seen as one of the ways in which active civic participation can be expressed, an applied activity that leads a person to carry out action in aid of another person".*

Four interviews offered varying reflections on the differences and similarities between volunteering and member participation. A certain amount of confusion was also created as was the use of *clichés*: it is overly simplistic to think that those involved in member participation cannot have an active role in other activities or that the volunteer cannot aspire to participate in decision-making processes, but must be exclusively involved in being operational. By summarising these observations in one sentence:

*"Volunteering is pro-active, member participation is support, but without an active role in initiatives". The common denominator is "implementing a common intention, a project, a goal".*

Lastly, it is important to point out how in general, the heads of the member policy sectors of the cooperatives provided a definition of member participation closely related to the cooperative reality they worked in. Contrarily, the definition of volunteering was mostly a general one, not specifically connected with Coop. In most cases, a common vision existed regarding the differences and similarities between the two concepts, particularly regarding one element: excluding any terminology confusion, volunteering and member participation are not synonymous; volunteering is considered a part of member participation, but member participation can also exist without volunteering. This characteristic, if on one hand confirms the theoretical basis described above, on the other, also certainly represents one of Coop's peculiarities that distinguishes it both from tout-court businesses and from pure associations determining balances and imbalances. This topic will be further discussed in the last chapter of this report.

### **3. Coop's volunteer-members: numbers**

In order to obtain an updated and sufficiently informative situation of volunteering and of quantifying volunteer members at Coop, the researchers firstly analysed data collected during the Seventh National Social Report of Consumer Cooperation (Coop) 2010.

Since Coop's structure is based on cooperatives that can be grouped into three levels of sizes (large, medium and small) it was decided together with the heads of the member policy sectors of

the cooperatives to address the preliminary research and the subsequent qualitative research on volunteers involving the 9 major cooperatives (*Coop Adriatica*, *Coop Estense* and *Coop Consumatori Nordest*, *Coop Liguria*, *Coop Lombardia* and *Nova Coop*, *Coop Centro Italia*, *Unicoop Firenze* and *Unicoop Tirreno*) and a small sample of medium-sized cooperatives that overall expressed territorial and corporate representation (*Coop Reno*, *Coop Unione di Trezzo sull'Adda*<sup>11</sup> and *Coop Amiatina*). The subgroup of cooperatives considered (Table 1.2) identified according to each macro-area – Adriatic district, Northwest district, and Tyrrhenian district – 3 large cooperatives and 1 medium-sized cooperative, the latter representative for size and territorial presence. To these cooperatives, a specific questionnaire was submitted to survey various characteristics regarding members and member policies.

**Table 1.2 - Cooperatives surveyed: members, volunteers, member sections and stores (Absolute figures)**

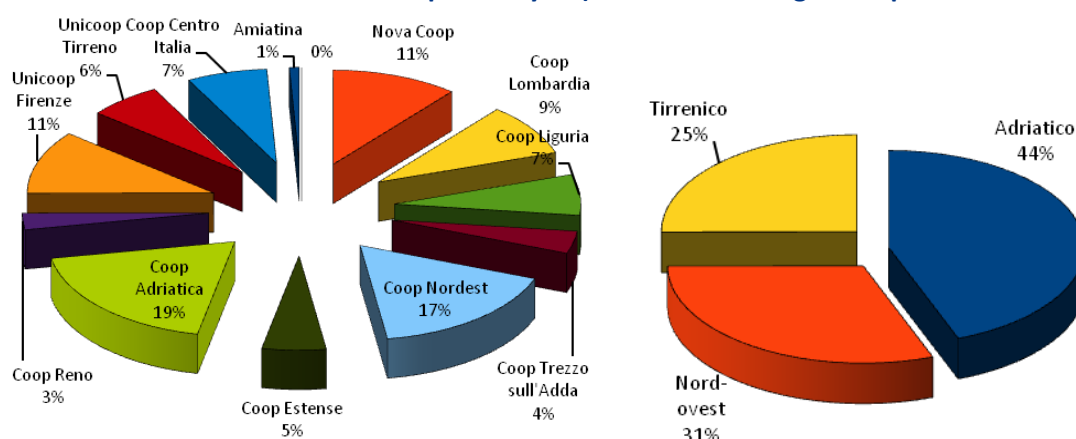
<i>Cooperatives</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Elected volunteer member</i>	<i>Non-Elected volunteer member</i>	<i>Total Volunteer Members</i>	<i>Member Sections</i>	<i>Stores</i>
<b>ADRIATICO</b>						
Coop Adriatica	1.156.554	446	954	1.400	26	<b>171</b>
Coop Estense	630.682	256	154	410	13	<b>54</b>
Coop Nordest	571.984	979	271	1.250	53	<b>85</b>
Coop Reno	65.673	173	35	208	26	<b>36</b>
<b>NORD-OVEST</b>						
Coop Liguria	505.097	361	155	516	39	<b>38</b>
Coop Lombardia	870.113	449	213	662	35	<b>49</b>
Nova Coop	657.832	786	25	811	48	<b>64</b>
Coop Trezzo sull'Adda	72.485	283	0	283	47	<b>37</b>
<b>TIRRENICO</b>						
Coop Amiatina	23.938	62	-	62	12	<b>17</b>
Coop Centro Italia	493.210	515	-	515	27	<b>66</b>
Unicoop Firenze	1.163.032	728	76	804	38	<b>103</b>
Unicoop Tirreno	895.873	434	35	469	29	<b>111</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.106.473</b>	<b>5.472</b>	<b>1.918</b>	<b>7.390</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>831</b>

Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire

Limiting the context was decided on one hand to facilitate the collection of the questionnaires and research procedures and, on the other, to mainly analyze the member sections and the cooperatives having more structured member involvement and participation policies, without however forgetting the importance of the small-sized cooperatives in these activities. Our context therefore covers 95% of the total members of Coop's system, over 7,100,00 members whose percentage distribution is reported in Figure 1.2.

<sup>11</sup> In this report we will always be discussing the cooperative *Coop Unione di Trezzo sull'Adda* using the cooperative's original name that was used until 2010 prior to its being named *Vicinato Lombardia*.

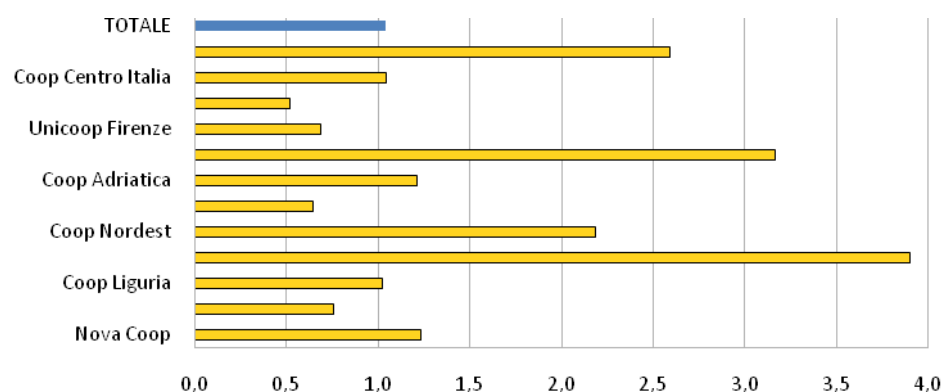
**Figure 1.2 - 2011 members of the 12 Coops surveyed (% value according to cooperative and macro-area)**



Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire

By observing the distribution of volunteers in the cooperatives compared to the number of members (Figure 1.3), further differences emerged: *Coop Consumatori Nordest* along with *Coop Unione di Trezzo sull'Adda* registered high levels, with an average of nearly 4 volunteers for every 1,000 members. This figure can be a proxy of the representation of the member base on the part of the volunteers: the higher the ratio, the more the volunteers represent the cooperative's corporate structure. It is also necessary to consider that in those cases where the membership is very numerous (for example, in *Coop Adriatica* or *Unicoop Firenze*, with over one million members), the number of volunteers does not increase in a directly proportional way since it would reach numbers that would be unmanageable.

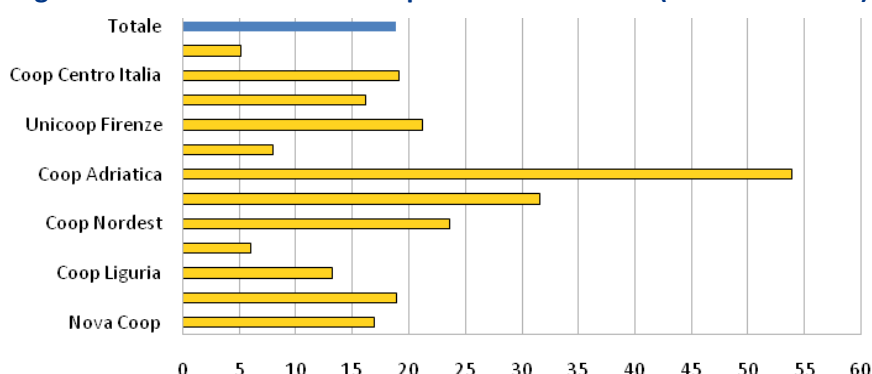
**Figure 1.3 - Volunteer members per cooperative for every thousand members (‰)**



Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire

The analysis according to member section (Figure 1.4) allows further reflections and is probably the most significant: it measures the level of territorial participation of Coop members. In fact, while *Coop Adriatica* has an average of over 50 volunteers in every member section, *Coop Amiatina* has an average of less than 5. The difference, in terms of capability of implementing member activities for the territory, is quite relevant. This however does not mean that even only a few volunteer members that are strongly motivated, cannot succeed in activating precious resources for the member activities of the cooperatives they belong to.

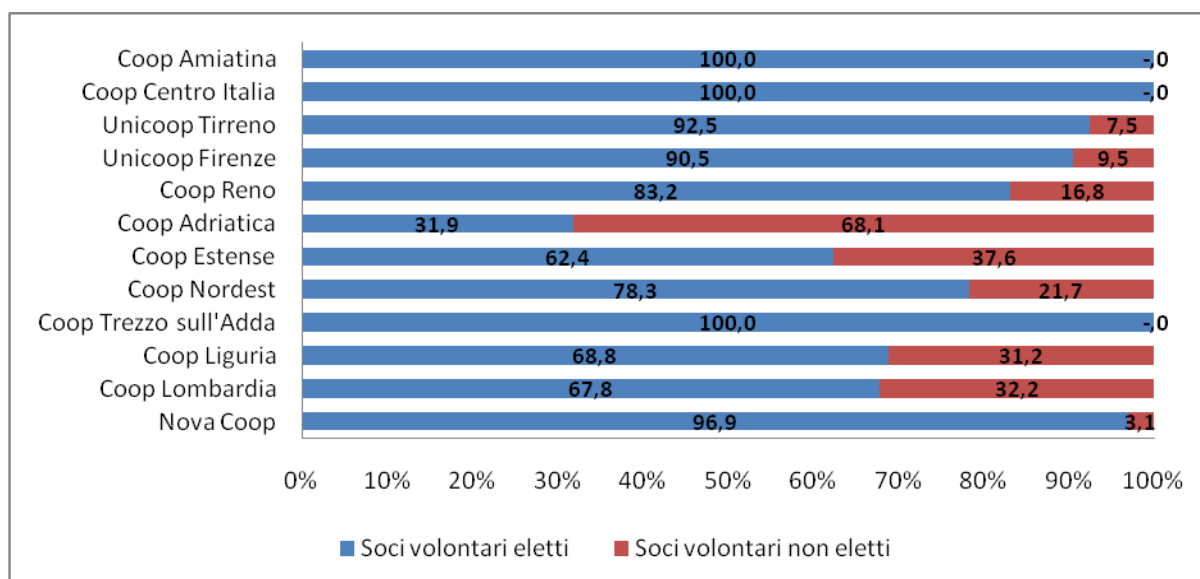
**Figure 1.4 - Volunteer members per member section (Absolute values)**



Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire

The analysis conducted up to now considered 8,501 total volunteer-members. However, within the cooperatives, a further distinction can be made between elected volunteer-members – that are part of a body of the member section (committee or board) regularly elected by all the members – and non-elected members – that offer their contribution to sector activities even though not officially belonging to them. The difference is often veiled according to different degrees. For certain cooperatives, not being elected means participation only in external activities, such as events and campaigns; in other cooperatives the non-elected volunteer-member can still participate even in the life of the member section such as in committee meetings, but without the right to vote. The distinction does not derive in any case from discrimination, but is connected to holding elections every three years and to the maximum number of participants in the committee established by the regulations of the each cooperative: if there are no numerical limits, a non-elected volunteer often becomes an elected volunteer by offering himself as a candidate in the first elections to be held.

**Figure 1.5 - Elected and non-elected volunteer members (%)**



Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire



Owing to these reasons, in each cooperative, the number of elected and non-elected volunteers varies considerably; if, out of 8,501 volunteers, an average of 64% volunteers is elected, two cooperatives – *Coop Unione di Trezzo sull'Adda* e *Coop Amiatina* – stated they did not have any non-elected volunteer-members. At *Nova Coop* these are only 3.1%. Vice-versa, at *Coop Adriatica* and *Coop Consumatori Nordest* non-elected volunteers represent the majority, respectively 67% and 56.1%.

Describing the general characteristics of the typical Coop volunteer-member, one can state that he is a retired male, with an average level of education, who was not a cooperative employee, but was only a member. If this is the typical image delineated from elaborating the aggregate data of the 12 cooperatives selected (Table 1.3), it is also representative of the average national data. Significant differences, contrarily, are noted for each cooperative, indicated in the high variation of data and in the presence of cooperatives and member sections having identical situations (based on the lowest and highest figures included in the tables): cooperatives where members are all male and cooperatives where members are all female; cooperatives where only retired volunteer-members and volunteer-members over 50 are present and cooperatives where youth represent over 60% of the total; cooperatives where volunteers have an advanced level of education (60% has a university degree) and those where the volunteer's role is clearly outlined and there is a risk of overlapping with the role and duties of the workers.

**Table 1.3 - Socio-demographic characteristics of the volunteer-members**

	<i>Women</i>	<i>&lt; 30 years old</i>	<i>&gt; 50 years old</i>	<i>Retired people</i>	<i>High school graduates</i>	<i>University Graduates</i>	<i>Former employees</i>	<i>Duties similar to workers</i>
Average	44.76	4.45	75.23	57.85	40.23	12.89	4.64	9.24
Std.Dev	18.79	7.64	20.64	23.15	17.11	12.77	6.42	19.38
Min	.00	.00	4.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Max	100.00	60.00	100.00	100.00	88.89	58.82	35.71	80

Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire

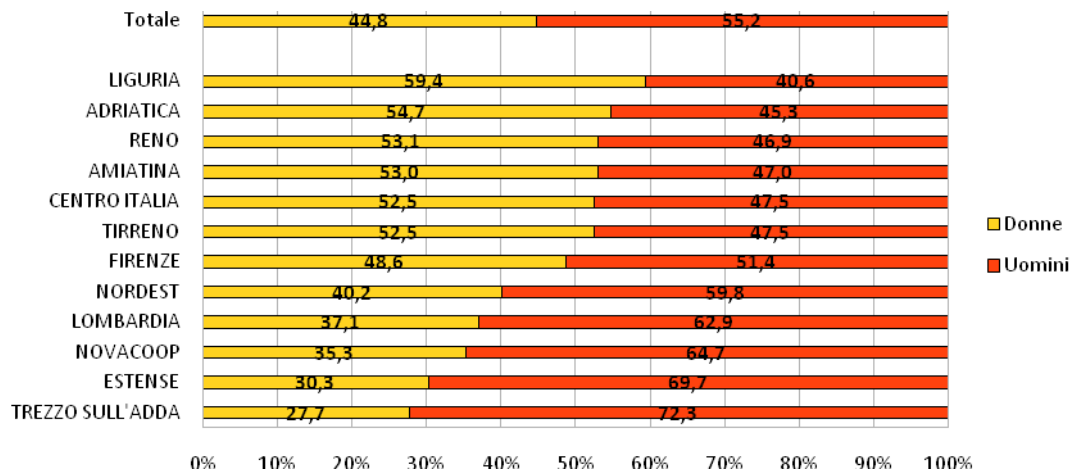
A detailed examination of certain variables indicated above all a different sensibility and involvement of female cooperatives. If on the average, the amount of female volunteers is slightly lower than males (approximately 45%), in five cooperatives – *Coop Liguria*, *Coop Adriatica*, *Coop Reno*, *Unicoop Tirreno* and *Coop Centro Italia* – the ratio is reversed: *Coop Liguria* is the one that registered the highest level of female volunteer participation, equal to nearly 60% of the total members. The lowest level of female participation was registered at *Coop Unione di Trezzo sull'Adda* (28%) and *Coop Estense* (30%).

With regard to age, the data according to each cooperative is quite uniform compared to the average age, but this is explained by a different composition according to the age of the elected volunteer-members. At the national level, it is not possible to affirm that Coop's volunteers are young people since only 4.5% of the volunteer-members are under 30 years old, while 75% are over 50. However, the contrary cannot be stated without the risk of exceptions, namely, that Coop's volunteers are exclusively elderly since the numbers of elderly volunteer-members are highly variable among cooperatives: from 23% of retired volunteers at *Coop Centro Italia* to the higher numbers registered at *Coop Liguria*, *Coop Estense* and *Nova Coop*, with 82%, 79% and 75%, respectively. These Coops have no young volunteers (0% for *Liguria* and *Estense*, 0.9% for *Nova Coop*).

Elderly volunteers represent a very large resource based on experience and often on the many years of knowledge of Coop's structure and values. Nonetheless, drawing young resources to

Coop through initiatives and tools that are of interest to this age group is a priority for maintaining the scope and breadth of member initiatives. This was confirmed by the heads of Coop's member policy sectors as will be further discussed in the chapter dedicated to the interviews with these sector heads.

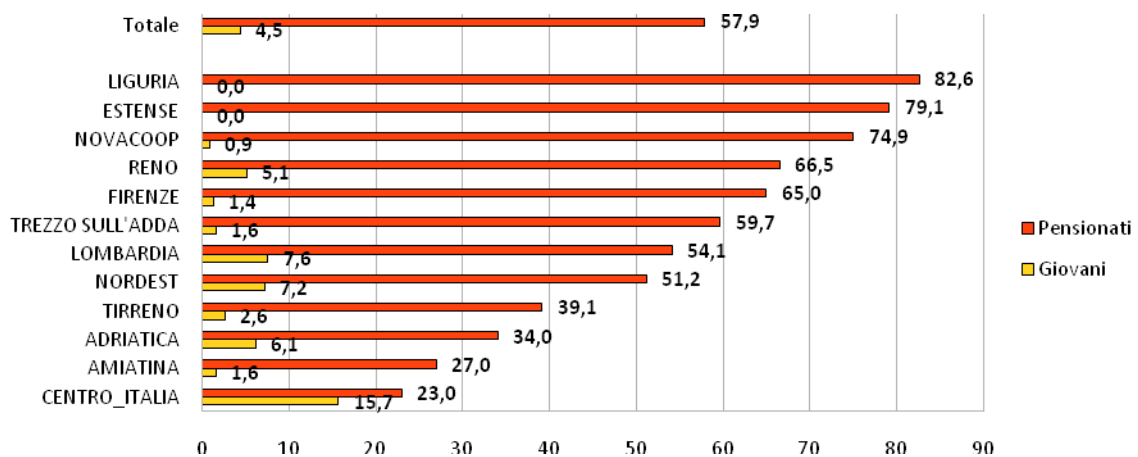
**Figure 1.6 - Volunteer-members according to gender (%)**



Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire

As mentioned above, analyzing the type of degree obtained indicates the prevalence of volunteer-members with a medium education level: nearly 40% of the volunteer-members has a high school degree while 13% has a university degree. These actually represent high percentages considering the rather high average age of the volunteers. In this case, the differences for each cooperative are not particularly significant.

**Figure 1.7 - Volunteer-members according to age group (% of youth under 30)**



Source: our processing of the cooperative questionnaire

Very few volunteer-members (4.6%) held work relations with the cooperative. A small amount (9.2%) carried out tasks similar to those of the workers belonging to the structure: this data, however, was recorded only at *Unicoop Tirreno* and at *Coop Lombardia* while in other Coops the distinction between active members and employees was even more marked. The possible conflict

between remunerated work and volunteering will be discussed in the analysis of the interviews with the heads of Coop's member policy sectors. It is now important to underline that a confusion among tasks does not exist which would represent a source of possible conflicts. The fact that active members almost never held remunerated work relations with the cooperatives on one hand confirms the above-mentioned distinction, but also highlights a certain distance and gap between workers and Coop's mission that could cautiously be bridged.

In conclusion, the general situation described up to now identifies volunteering characterized by obvious differences between people and cooperatives and underlies the marked loyalty of the volunteer-members in the cooperative. Owing to these differences, the most important aspect will be to identify whether these member perceptions and motivations are different according to their characteristics and the typical groups in which they can be included. It is easy to anticipate the importance of reflecting on the possible juxtaposition within the cooperative of different positions and the sense of belonging of the young members and the older ones, that have been operating within the cooperative for a long or short time, with ideals, motivations and objectives that could differ and that are the objective of this research's analysis.

#### **4. Volunteer-member involvement: organization and policies**

To understand how volunteer-members are involved in the cooperative, specific questions were asked to the heads of the member policy sectors of the 9 major cooperatives and of the 3 medium sized cooperatives selected for this research.<sup>12</sup> The organizational structure of volunteering and of member activities was quite similar among the 12 cooperatives when their lower levels were analyzed. However, also owing to the different sizes of the cooperatives, the higher levels also revealed differences in structure, with "short line" cooperatives where from the member section, the next level was represented by the Board of Directors that was next to the former, and other cooperatives having a larger number of intermediate bodies.

In general, the participation cell is the group of volunteer-members that is formed around one store, or in some cases, various stores. These cells can be called "member sections", "store member committee", "member area", or "member districts",<sup>13</sup> but all are characterized by the common function of aggregation and of overseeing the territory, even if they don't always have their own internal structure. At the immediate higher level, there is only another body that each times takes on the name of "member district", "member area", "member area committee", or "territorial committee". The function of this second level body is, however, different among cooperatives: it generally groups various member sections and the first level can have an internal organizational structure with a president and an executive committee, in those cases where the member section is not structured; oppositely, in some cooperatives, this can only have a coordination function if the member section has all the bodies capable of making it operational. Cooperatives also exist where these groupings are not present and the second level is directly formed by the "meetings of presidents of member sections". This body is present in all the cooperatives, but in the more structured cooperatives and in the member sections organized into "Areas" or "Districts" moves up to the higher level. In one case, the head of the member policy sector stated that the meetings of

---

<sup>12</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Chapter 5 discusses the interviews with the heads of the member policy sectors, it is nonetheless useful to preview their reflections on the involvement modalities and on the Coop structure that will be functional to studying the following section, providing a broader vision of the context in which the elected volunteer-members operated.

<sup>13</sup> Since the most commonly used name is member sections, it will be used during the rest of this report.

the member section presidents are very important in the organizational structure since decisions made are then brought by the president to his representatives.

The elections of the top management of these bodies generally occur every 3 years (in only one case every 4) and are always based on self-candidacy of members. In many cases, but not in all, an electoral Commission is present that monitors the process and proposes a list of initial candidates which the members then integrate or modify, or the Commission takes action on the complete list of self-candidates. Candidacy is often based on various requirements such as experience accrued, or a minimum presence in the cooperative. In 6 cases out of twelve, the heads of the member policy sectors interviewed expressed doubts and perplexities compared to representation that is often unbalanced in favour of elderly people. In other cases, rotation was lacking and candidates were often “the usual known ones”. To correct this imbalance, various cooperatives have used the mandatory introduction of criteria that guarantee representation according to age, social class or profession.

For the higher organizational levels, there is no description of the cooperative structure on the part of all the people interviewed. However, it was noted how particularly in the major cooperatives, there was an additional level before the Board of Directors that in many cases was directly elected, either entirely or partly, by the votes of the members. The intermediate bodies can be simple “President’s Meetings” summoned according to variable time frames and for particular occasions, but these are often more stable bodies whose names vary from “Board” to “General Board”, from “Member participation Forum”, to “Council” and they manage to join the representatives of the bodies of the underlying levels.<sup>14</sup> Other organizational levels exist that could also be defined as “institutional occasions”: occurring every six months, or annually, or in some cases, even every three years, in which the cooperative directly summons all the members to discuss important topics of the cooperative’s strategic policies. These are called “Member representation group” or “Member council”.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, a series of supplementary bodies exist adopted only by certain cooperatives such as the “Ethical Committee”, called to draw up the cooperative’s “Code of Ethics” or the Internal Committees of the Board of Directors called to work on various special issues and therefore divided according to sectors.

A special note should be made regarding the Member Policy Sector. This body manages volunteer initiatives. This central office has officials as its employees (often defined as “territorial heads” or “area heads”) that carry out the fundamental role as the connecting link with the member sections or districts (a structure used by 6 cooperatives). Slight differences do exist, however, regarding duties and responsibility according to each cooperative. In some cases, they simply participate in the meetings of the member sections or of the districts and they coordinate them. In one case, they were not limited to only these functions, but also manage a fund that integrates the resources that the member sections have for their activities. In another case, the head of the sector examined the activities to be implemented based on the economic aspects and consistency with Coop’s general themes.

These bodies do not represent the general rule, or at least not all those that were interviewed spoke about them. Some explained that the central office has a direct contact with the member

---

<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, if the cooperative does not group its member sections into “Areas” or “Districts”, this body directly joins the presidents of the member sections, namely, the first level bodies and consequently it becomes the second organizational level where important decisions are often made.

<sup>15</sup> The name “Council” is sometimes used for those bodies that group various presidents of the lower level bodies and often for this occasion as a general meeting. As we have seen, this confusion exists also among first and second level bodies.

sections (or with districts) even through their presidents for coordinating initiatives. In some instances, some of the intermediate bodies mentioned above carry out these duties; it is the case of the “Member section council”, of the “Council of the presidents of the member sections”, of the “General Council of the member sections”, or of a particular body, not previously mentioned, named “General Assembly”.

The levels of autonomy of the member sections are, however, generally high and in most cases, each one of them (or the reference district) has its own budget to be managed autonomously, provided it is done so in compliance with the cooperative’s general objectives. The entity of this budget varies considerably and is often established on the basis of criteria such as sales, number of members, billings or member loans (criteria used also for defining the number of positions in the top management). Those interviewed often wished to note that if the initiative is deemed valid, the necessary funds are provided. In the remaining cases, where the budget is managed at the central level, the member sections or their representatives are still involved for determining how the budget will be divided and the general activity plan.

#### *4.1 Strong and weak points of the models adopted*

In discussing the strong points of their models, many heads of member policies underlined the strong territorial rooting since volunteer-members connected to a particular store also become the main players of activities and consequently the first cooperative representatives with third parties. In the case of less structured systems, the importance was highlighted of the “short line”, namely, the passage from a member section to the Board of Directors allowing a more direct relationship with the company’s top management. In one case the model’s strong points were given another interpretation affirming that the strong groups are those that have many activities that work well. As if to say that beyond the model that is adopted, what really counts is the quality of each participant in the various member sections, a reason that will be discussed later. In other cases, importance was given to the wide opening of the model, focusing on representation by gender or age, or the importance of volunteering within a well structured organization equipped with resources, like Coop, that allows a more effective action to be carried out. Lastly, two particular aspects are worth mentioning: one of the people interviewed highlighted how already from the initial approach, the new volunteer is directed towards working groups that deal with specific themes within the member section (always among those in line with Coop’s major themes), allowing each one to carry out the activities he likes best; in two cooperatives, contrarily, it was underlined that the majority of the volunteer-members come from the “common left-wing world”. This characteristics emerged as a double-edged-sword: if on one hand it was seen as being an advantage since it allowed having cohesive member sections that are tightly knit, on the other, it becomes a barrier for accessing new people that are foreign to that world, above all, youth. This strong homogeneous ideological and biographical aspect will be further discussed also identifying the consequences on the internal climate and on the sense of volunteer-member participation.

Moving on to examining the weak points, 2 cooperatives did not identify any critical points in their structure. Two of the heads underlined instead the negative consequences of highly structured models: the cost they involve in terms of resources and the difficulty to understand them on the part of the newcomers. A comment was made regarding the large gap between volunteering activity and company decisions that in some cases leads to a sense of frustration for the volunteers that are most committed and wish to make a difference. Another particular comment regarded the risk of self-reference: in this case the structure that the cooperative intended

to take on was characterized by a broad autonomy of each member section that risked becoming a trend to focusing greatly on the voices of the reference territory and to focusing too little on the general situation, leading to a certain partiality when choices were made regarding projects to be promoted. Other problems noted regarded the time limit that a volunteer, as such, could dedicate to his activity, the strong territorial dispersion and consequently difficulties in communication and lastly, the lack of a general framework in organizing activities that leads to no impact of the action and difficulty in communicating the project.

#### 4.2 Policies towards volunteer members

Analyzing policies for managing relations with volunteers is very structured at Coop. Planning processes clearly emerged, as well as flow processes, that particular focus on the inflow modalities of new members and policies aimed at studying forms of compensation, or more generally, of creating incentives for participation.

By observing recruiting policies, the heads of member policy sectors were asked to judge any possible difficulties in collecting candidates among the volunteer-member. In 8 cases out of 12, there was a general complaint about a low number of candidates, even if 4 of those interviewed specified that the problem was linked only to a few particular areas. Of the other 4, 3 identified the cause in the difficulty in communicating the breadth of social activities and of volunteering at Coop and one stated the problem was connected to the generational turnover in progress. Even in the 4 interviews where there was no complaint of the scarce number of candidates, 2 of those interviewed admitted that a great deal of work was required for reaching a satisfactory number and only 2 expressed a definite “no”, even if in one case a very high turnover rate was noted and in the other, the age limitation was reiterated and the difficulty in influencing the cooperative’s choices.

**Table 1.4 - Difficulty perceived by the heads of the member policy sectors in finding candidates for territorial committee members**

<b>Yes (8)</b>	<b>No (4)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In particular areas (4)</li> <li>• Yes, we find it difficult to communicate coop’s member participation (3)</li> <li>• Yes, it is a generational turnover problem (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No, but it is very difficult to collect them (2)</li> <li>• No, but we have a very high turnover rate (1)</li> <li>• No, but we do not succeed in involving the volunteers that we would like: the average age is very high (1)</li> </ul>

*Note: frequency of opinion is included in brackets*

*Source: our processing of responses in the interviews with the heads of the member policy sectors*

With respect to incentive policies, contrarily, a discrete level of homogeneity was recorded in treatment of volunteer-members in the cooperatives: it is difficult that the members holding the position of councilor or president receive expense reimbursements or limited benefits. Only in one case the area or district presidents received compensation, while in one case, purchase coupons were given to volunteers responsible for demanding initiatives that involved respecting deadlines and that went beyond mere volunteer work.

If incentives were carried out also on the non-material or monetary level, it was however true that specific innovative policies were not implemented by the cooperatives for motivating member participation. In 4 cases the heads of member policies stated they did not implement any organizational innovation, while in 3 cooperatives the dual system was recently adopted and among the remaining 5, the following novelties were implemented:

- a total change in model;

- introducing the self-candidacy method;
- member assessment of the store;
- a new method for electing the Board of Directors: 75% elected by members, the remaining 25% by appointment of the Central Commission;
- a general improvement in the division into member sections to be increased for reducing the number of second level bodies.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.3 Objectives of social activities and opportunities for member involvement

In discussing the objectives of social activities, the fundamental issue regarding relations with the territory arose frequently, as mentioned before and often those interviewed went into great detail to explain which themes were focused on and promoted through activities. It is significant to include various responses to the questions: "Which are the objectives of the social activities/initiatives organized by your cooperative through committees/councils?"

*"[...] to build these<sup>17</sup> relations with the territory. The greatest commitment lies in corporate social responsibility and in a pathway towards sustainability. [...]. We are particularly committed in the field of social policies, not exclusively, but mainly, on 5 topics: consumption, environment, solidarity, culture and now we have also added legality".*

*"We are interested in creating a network, in synergy, based on relations with the territory. We wish to create opportunities, both for our volunteer-members and through them, creating opportunities for others around us".*

*"Create a connection with the territory [...] implementing the mission that is to represent the usefulness of the cooperative's presence in the territory".*

As the last comment indicates, focusing on the territory was often joined with promoting the cooperative's mission, its values, principles and themes promoted by the Coop itself. In other words, in connection with other comments made in the interviews, it is very important to practically implement Coop's distinctive identity, compared to other similar realities, which is needed to promote and spread it. Largely focusing on education was also noted and in one particular case training initiatives were stated as being the cooperative's greatest activity. The response included in one of the interviews was significant with respect to the objectives:

*"[...] (to) respond to a part of our mission that is to educate our consumers and implement initiatives that involve the communities".*

Only one particular case emerged where the attention was shifted more within the cooperative rather than externally and it was stated that social activities are carried out to

*"create closeness, participation, involvement on the part of the members in the cooperative's life".*

Member involvement, therefore, appeared as being one of the objectives of social activities. It is no coincidence that volunteer-members are not only involved in implementing these activities, but also in the planning phase of the social activities. A widespread practice worthy of note in defining activities to be carried out is to address the territory to hear its voice. The activism of the various member sections was highlighted for examining the local needs to study, plan and fund initiatives by using the network of relations with the community and then propose them to the cooperative.

<sup>16</sup> In this case it should be noted that this choice was made following the statement that up to now the member sections and districts had been created randomly and spontaneously.

<sup>17</sup> The adjective "these" was included to literally quote the interview and refers to the fact that in the immediately previous question, relations with the territory had been discussed.

Not all activities are implemented in this way and not in all the cooperatives. The common limit also exists that these activities must be restricted to areas of interest shared by Coop. Some cooperatives participate and finance also initiatives in partnership with other associations while others are dedicated exclusively to those promoted by their own group. Many national projects also exist where the member section becomes the executive branch always requiring volunteer-member participation for guaranteeing the initiative's success. Members are urged to participate also in other occasions, particularly in 2 other areas (following the division underlined by one of those interviewed): promoting the cooperative in the store and institutional meetings. The first objective is implemented in establishing dialogue with consumers, urging them to becoming Coop members, promoting Coop brand products and in member loans. The direct contact between volunteer-members and consumers represented a fundamental point. In other phases of the interviews, more than one of those interviewed underlined the importance of this element for recruiting members, spreading the knowledge of Coop's identity and promoting it across the territory with alternative methods to those of the large advertising campaigns. In this sense, it was considered very important to have spaces dedicated to members and to their internal activities located inside the stores. The second area regards the organization of budget meetings, or similar types of meetings. In these cases, the section on member participation will reveal that results obtained were not always considered satisfactory by members.

#### *4.4 Initiatives implemented, results obtained and critical points*

Among the social activities, the most important initiatives mentioned by the heads of the member policies were those implemented on a national scale, such as *"Approvato dai Soci"* (Approved by Members), *"Buon Fine"* (Product Donation), or *"Brutti ma Buoni"* (Recovering Flawed Products), consumer awareness information activities and home delivery of the shopping for elderly people (usually identified by cooperatives with different names). Moreover, each cooperative developed solidarity initiatives having a local, national or international nature based on an awareness to certain themes or on researching alternative and specific social activities for one's own territory. In this way, several cooperatives established in their points catalogues for members the possibility of donating the equivalent of points collected to various international, national or local solidarity projects, while other cooperatives established the sale of coupons for fund raising for similar projects. In one case the cooperative created a Foundation for promoting solidarity with the South of the World, while another cooperative addressed its volunteer-member awareness to environmental protection activities. Also interesting was the case of a cooperative that tried to align the role of its volunteer-members with a broader program for enhancing youth volunteering promoted by the Municipal Administration.<sup>18</sup> Lastly, one cooperative introduced literacy programs and services for the elderly carried out by young people. This latter program led to great satisfaction not only for the wide participation received, but also, in the words of one of those interviewed:

---

<sup>18</sup> This program included asking youth to support with their work various public structures such as libraries or social centers, even through providing computer training to the elderly. In exchange, these young people received points on a special Youth Card issued by the Municipality on the basis of which they received services addressed to them by the public administration. One of the major results obtained was that in many cases the young people were very active in volunteering, accumulating points, which they never used, demonstrating that volunteering was based on purely altruistic motivations and not aimed at obtaining personal benefits. Owing to the positive results, the initiative was also implemented by the neighboring Municipalities.



*"The wonderful aspect of this initiative is not only the service we are providing to members, but above all the effort for creating opportunities for volunteering, namely of aligning with the values that are the true cooperative values".<sup>19</sup>*

The great importance of these projects consisted in the twofold impact on training of recipients and on promoting volunteering, on solidarity and cooperative values also among youth. In line with these objectives, it was noted that one cooperative created an Association for implementing social aggregation programs. One of the above-mentioned programs was to identify projects across the territory to be promoted in collaboration with other associations. Another program included organizing excursions along itineraries in the region.

Other interesting initiatives promoted by each cooperative regarded:

- building sections inside the stores distant from the municipal libraries;
- collaborating in organizing the Perugia-Assisi march;
- co-planning zero impact housing together with technical institutes in the territory (with the involvement of companies that provided materials);
- organizing regional cooking classes;
- opportunities for social tourism;
- food collecting during the Global Day Against Poverty;
- promoting fresh *pasta* products made by a community of the psychologically disabled, by placing them in stores and creating "widespread information" provided by the members on the products.

Initiatives similar to the above-mentioned one for *Libera Terra* and *Solidal* products.

What results have these initiatives led to? Many actually agreed in stating that the greatest consequences occurred in terms of visibility and above all, in informing on Coop's peculiarity, its particular structure, capable of blending entrepreneurship and values through implemented practices. As we have seen, one of the factors limiting the number of self-candidates and of participation was the population's limited knowledge of this social aspect. Based on the opinions expressed by those interviewed, the actual activities were the best way for remedying this communication gap. The more people communication is addressed to, the more it becomes effective. For this purpose, it is important to observe that the numbers of participants were always high and their attitudes and conduct were a reason for satisfaction. The same holds true with respect to other entities across the territory such as organizations and institutions that are involved based on a mutual advantage. In one case, the connection was noted between the number of activities implemented by a specific municipality/territory and the large consumer turnout in the stores that was often significantly higher than normal even after various months following the activity that was carried out. After some time, the consumer turnout began to decrease, but "someone always remains attached". Within this context, activities also contributed to draw closer, or re-draw closer those customers that owing "to consolidated habits" (as referred to by the person interviewed) shopped at other companies. Aside from these considerations, some of those interviewed pointed out that the results of the activities were represented by the material aid guaranteed to them. Specifically, there was no need for any further justification to implement such activities beyond the scope of the activities themselves representing both the means and goal since considered as being "good" in themselves.

During the interviews, in addition to the results, questions were raised regarding the weak points of these initiatives. Once again, the issue regarding communication emerged. If on one hand

---

<sup>19</sup> In this case, the recipients of the initiative were not all elderly people living in the territory, but cooperative members.

those interviewed admitted that these initiatives are very effective in creating an awareness and informing the people involved, the difficulty was also underlined of reaching third parties, those that absorb Coop's image only through large advertising campaigns and are unaware of this aspect. The new means of communication should be used to spread an understanding, using the effective expressions used in one of the interviews that:

*"things are also done differently and not only by using an actress like Littizzetto".*

In other cases self-criticism was often addressed to the "fragmented" action that is carried out without being part of a coherent frame work. In addition to losing their impact and effectiveness, this also contributes to creating communication difficulties. It is important to note, even though this did not actually emerge during the interviews, that it represents the other side of the coin of leaving the freedom of promoting initiatives to the members, as well as to the territory and that therefore the two needs for coherence and autonomy require special attention to be reconciled and harmonized. Another criticality lies in the costs of these initiatives that could not make them sustainable over time. Other two interviews underlined the importance of promoting initiatives that arose directly from the members and were not imposed, also reflecting on results. Lastly, concern was expressed for self-reference that could distort the selection of projects to be implemented.

#### *4.5 Distinguishing characteristics of each cooperative and comparative advantages*

The characteristics of the organizational structures and of the policies promoted by the various cooperatives as of now leads to reflecting on the possible comparative advantages enjoyed by each cooperative. The heads of the member policy sectors interviewed were explicitly requested to identify the peculiar elements of their own cooperative with respect to other ANCC cooperatives or with respect to the overall Coop system, indicating the advantages derived from their own structure. The first interesting remark was that most of those interviewed were unable to list any distinguishing characteristics or advantages to their respective cooperative since policies are often based on the principles in line with the articles of association common to all Coops, but on the other (and this represented a limitation) the cooperative is not directly compared with others belonging to ANCC. It is however true, that the comments made by those interviewed highlighted general advantages:

- The presence of members in the stores that for two of the cooperatives was essential for "humanizing the store" and communicating Coop's different identity.
- The vision of the volunteer as an active citizen. In the words of the person interviewed: "In this sense, we have an entirely different approach [...] listening to members, to citizens, an in-depth relation with associations and institutions. These efforts allow us to always have an updated vision of what occurs in the world; sometimes we understand it and other times we don't".
- Identifying unique themes chosen annually by the members that allow everyone working toward a single goal. According to the person interviewed, this facilitates communication and creates great enthusiasm among members. This could be a method for joining autonomy in proposing projects and obtaining effective results in communication.
- The special attention dedicated to social aggregation, pursued by the creation of a specific Association into which all the proposals for social and recreational activities flow.
- Attention to emerging sensibilities, to interest groups that are currently on the margins of member participation owing to the age difference and to the use of new media for involving

them. The comparative advantages are being assessed, but are certainly based on spreading Coop's positive image and the strong connection between Coop and its members.

- Advantages for the community as a specific characteristic and as a comparative advantage to the "desire to find real partners among the members".
- The high comparison among member sections with respect to the initiatives implemented, promoted for example during the annual councils.
- Creating a Foundation for the attentive use of the media thanks to a journal, a website and a dedicated weekly television program.
- Drawing members closer to the commercial section to favour a sense of belonging to the cooperative. This is pursued through 2 pathways. The first allows members to choose a product to be sold at a discounted price. The second is a meeting on the store in which members can discuss issues regarding it.

## CHAPTER II

### THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The previous chapter discussed the context, highlighting structure, numbers and policies of the Coop system. This chapter aims at introducing the reader to the research's objectives, the purpose of which is to understand the role held within this structure by the volunteer and the volunteer-members' perception of this role. A preface and a little survey of the literature are useful for reflecting on the role of the volunteer-member and for clarifying the innovative approach of our research.

The year of volunteering highlighted the relevance of this phenomenon not only for producing corporate capitals, but also for generating value added for the organizations that influence and support it. Volunteers represent for organizations a source of economic saving, but also – and above all – a source of innovation, visibility and trust, communication and closeness to customers, in one word of “competitive advantages”. Volunteers represent an asset especially important for non-profit organizations since they allow distribution of greater services (freely or semi-freely) in favour of customers and of the organization's other stakeholders.

Within this scenario, the presence at Coop of over 8,000 volunteer-members, inclusive of elected members in the local committees as well as other ones, represents a clear indicator of the organization's capability of attracting people interested in its social value. The presence of volunteer-members is even more relevant considering they represent an indicator of member participation. A reflection on the role of volunteer-members must not only be made based on the levels of member participation. It also needs to take into consideration: ownership and governance levels, time and effort spent in promoting the service and implementing activities, and above all, social participation. This last has in fact important consequences on the territory and on the sense of belonging and sharing the organization's mission. Therefore, volunteering activities must firstly be analysed in terms of member participation, by exploring the phenomenon and the motivations underlying member participation.

The question is: which theoretical studies and empirical analyses have been conducted up to now on the themes of this research and how can this report contribute to a more detailed analyses of this phenomenon? The subject of this research is certainly quite original since it summarizes a twofold nature: volunteering and members. Both figures are examined in literature, but often and mainly dealing separately with studying the motivations of the volunteers workers and of the motivations of the cooperative members. Only in social cooperatives and in some non-profit organizations where volunteers are often involved in the membership, investigations have also examined the contribution of the volunteer-member in corporate management. We would now like to suggest some reflections on this literature.

First of all, there has been a large and widespread amount of literature on volunteering. This leads to reflecting mainly on the dynamics of altruism and on the behavioural sources that lead people to freely donate their work, simply for improving the satisfaction and well-being of others, sacrificing their own for this purpose. The two terms associated to studying volunteering are “donation” and “altruism”. Donations are particularly studied since this term reflects the non-monetary nature of the action<sup>20</sup> and the literature demonstrates that the donation carried out by the volunteers of social organizations succeeds in changing the concepts underlying the economic

---

<sup>20</sup> Zamagni S. (2005), *Gratuità e agire economico: il senso del volontariato*, *Working paper Aiccon*, n. 9.

institutions: it shifts the focus from egotistical and for-profit objectives, to solidarity aims and social wellbeing. The donation promoted by volunteers becomes an economically and socially efficient mechanism: economically efficient since it uses human resources that would otherwise be unused by the market and by the for-profit organizations and also because added resources are produced that can be re-distributed; socially efficient since it produces capital and guarantees a greater social integration thanks to altruistic dynamics and to the desire for creating a more fair society.

In defining altruism, Sen<sup>21</sup> introduces two key concepts; the one of “sympathy” and the one of “obligation”. An action is produced by sympathy when the increased level of satisfaction of the beneficiaries also positively influences the level of the satisfaction of the agent, that in turn also enjoys and is satisfied with the improved conditions of others. In other words, when the agent feels sympathy for another person, he shares in their suffering and happiness, therefore, the actions he undertakes in favour or to the detriment of others are ultimately egotistical since aimed at improving one’s own satisfaction through improving the satisfaction of others. An action is initiated by a sense of obligation when the person operates based on an external moral principle. In other words, a person chooses between two possibilities of action deemed correct, even in the case when the action chosen produces less satisfaction than the other alternative. One could state that an action initiated by a sense of obligation does not generate satisfaction at the time it is decided and that is actually perceived by the person as being costly in terms of immediate satisfaction, but that it will eventually produce satisfaction in the long term. The study of these two components of altruism is particularly interesting even when considered in an organizational context since firms can influence the perception of the obligation toward altruism of their workers and consequently firms can support volunteering behaviour by providing non-monetary incentives that are not included in the contract. A great deal of attention is also placed on volunteers as promoters of altruism within the organizations (see for example Mittone<sup>22</sup>) and as players capable of generating and strengthening an ethical system or a code of ethics.

On the basis of this vision of volunteering, many empirical analyses have explored the presence of volunteers in socio-economic contexts and in the different countries to assess how the current economies are based on this incomparable human resource. They have studied how volunteers increase organizational outcomes, for example by allowing a distributive function and an over-production of service that are then provided for free or semi-free to the more indigent groups. Some studies have analyzed who the volunteers are, examining their socio-demographic<sup>23</sup> characteristics and helping to succeed in identifying the possible sources for finding new volunteers. Little attention has been contrarily dedicated to the possibility that the volunteer is not a pure altruist, but presents a mix of motivations ranging from purely altruistic components (‘I do this for others and for the social usefulness of this work’) to more individualistic and egotistic components (‘I do this since perhaps this might open up a future possibility of being hired by the company or because it improves my curriculum’). These motivations are obviously not present in all the volunteers, but the motivational mix open the discussion to the presence of different types of volunteers within the companies.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Sen A. (1986), *Collective choice and social welfare*, San Francisco, Holden-Day Inc.

<sup>22</sup> Mittone L. (2003), “Altruismo etico e coordinamento nelle organizzazioni: un approccio sperimentale”, in Borzaga C., Musella M., *Produttività ed efficienza nelle organizzazioni non profit*, Edizioni 31, Trento, pp. 129-160.

<sup>23</sup> Fazzi L. (2000), “I volontari”, in Borzaga C., *Capitale umano e qualità del lavoro nei servizi sociali*, Roma, FIVOL, pp. 265-294.

<sup>24</sup> Marino D., Michelutti M., Schenkell M. (2003), “Soddisfazione, atteggiamenti e motivazioni dei volontari”, in Borzaga C., Musella M., *Produttività ed efficienza nelle organizzazioni non profit*, Edizioni 31, Trento, pp. 351-384.

Will this be the approach followed by the present research? From our point of view there is no literature capable of providing an exhaustive study on the specific components of a cooperative's volunteer-member. Up to now we have only presented a part of the literature capable of explaining the actions of a volunteer. Above all, we feel that the role of Coop's volunteer-member has a different depth from what has been explored up to now and must be studied according to different methods and perspectives. Of particular interest is the vision of the volunteer-members as stakeholders of consumer cooperatives. Before initiating the study, it is therefore essential to reflect, on one hand, on the motivations of people and on the other, on the behavioural approach in general.

## 1. The theory of participation in corporate governance

The ownership of a company is defined as the sum of profit rights and control rights over the company, where the former are identified by the decision regarding the distribution of profits and are based on an economic return of the investment made, the latter concern decisions regarding the company's management modalities. From this approach,<sup>25</sup> cooperatives differ from limited companies since the ownership and the governance are assigned to stakeholders different from simple providers of capital of the for-profit businesses where the interest of these stakeholders prevail, establishing also the organizational mission. Just to mention a few examples, worker cooperatives are organizations owned and governed by those offering their work and their objective is protecting employment and distributing sufficiently high salaries; producer cooperatives are organizations controlled by the producers, such as farmers, and are aimed at guaranteeing access to production input at lower costs or to the sale of their products on the end market at more competitive and profitable costs for the producers themselves.

The consumer cooperatives we are specifically examining are organizations that are owned and controlled by consumers. Their economic role is identified (see Hansmann's theory) by the willingness of consumer groups to overcome the monopolistic power of retailers at the territorial level or the market control on the part of a few stores, but also to more specifically control the quality of products guaranteeing its higher level. Consumer cooperatives are therefore organizations that protect the interests of end consumers allowing them to enter the membership and allowing them to have decision-making powers. As cooperatives, the governance is characterized by democracy, intended as respecting the principle of "one head, one vote" and thus being independent of the shares owned; of mutuality intended as mainly pursuing the interests of member-owners; of the open door indicated by the cooperative principles as accepting in their membership anyone wishing to be part of it. In this case, the enterprise's governance would be identified as a single-stakeholder governance: the membership should be formed by a single type of interested parties, namely, the consumers, while expanding the cooperative's purpose to including the local community's satisfaction or marginal groups of people should exclusively be undertaken according to the inspiring guidelines of the seventh cooperative principle, known as "interest towards the community". This same principle also refers to the one included in the Statement of the Cooperative Identity: "Cooperatives operate for a lasting and sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members", namely, they do not only have a purely entrepreneurial or mutual nature, but they have the task of contributing to

---

<sup>25</sup> The most famous study is the one conducted by Hansmann, recently included in the Italian version of his work, Hansmann H. (2010), *La proprietà dell'impresa*, Il Mulino, Bologna.

solving the community's social and economic problems (Conference of the International Cooperative Alliance, 1995). This, however, does not imply expanding the membership to the community, but simply being socially responsible cooperatives, verifying their impact on the territory and interacting locally for promoting socially relevant initiatives for the community. This principle seems to be actively pursued in those consumer cooperatives that include among their goods and services elements having a solidarity, social and altruistic nature. This is represented in selling ecological and organic and fair trade products, as well as products coming from the territory's social cooperatives and organizations. It also includes socially relevant services such as home deliveries for the elderly, youth policies or policies for the territory, recreational services for members and for the local communities, social awareness and educational campaigns, etc.

The question is: when are social interests brought from the external world into the organization? If many cooperatives (not only consumer cooperatives) have a social impact and pursue social objectives, without involving the beneficiaries or the communities in management policies, other cooperatives can decide to include these different categories of people in their membership. The nature of the cooperative thus becomes more complex since the member is no longer identified in a single precise category (the consumer), but can also hold a different role within the organization. Expanding the membership leads to a multi-stakeholder governance structure where along with the consumer-members, volunteer-members, for example, also exist.

This is the case for Coop. Even though the cooperative is actually a consumer cooperative and even though the actual volunteer-member has a customer relation with Coop, the fact that he identifies with the term "volunteer" indicates the motivation for his involvement and the type of interests that the member brings to the cooperative: not only those as a consumer, but also those of someone who belongs to the community in which the cooperative operates, carrying out for the cooperative volunteer activities, freely donating his work for a specific mission presenting the characteristics of altruism and of striving for the well-being and satisfaction of others. Considering the economic theory, Coop is presented as a particular consumer cooperative, with an ownership structure controlled by people holding different interests, not only by consumers. Just as the organizational mission is based part on the mutual purpose of providing consumers with quality goods at adequate prices and part on the social purpose to be attentive to the territory and to indigent groups of people, even the membership is similarly formed by people with potentially non-aligned interests: consumer-members with more self-interested interests, volunteer-members with strongly altruistic motivations.

What are the theoretical implications of a similar structure of governance? The advantages certainly include a closer relationship with the territory, a greater production of corporate capital and of positive actions on the territory (that impact the local and social development), finding resources not present in other organizations (volunteering is a source of work time donated freely and of innovations and knowledge that are brought to the organization), a greater transmission of information and bridging the gap between demand and offer. However, the more the membership is expanded and extended to people with different interests, the more the costs will increase for governance management and for decision-making processes. In particular, combining volunteer and consumer interests can be difficult and lead to lengthy decision-making processes or can lead to the predominance of the interests of one group over another in a non-representational way.

Is Coop faced with greater costs or with greater benefits from its expanded governance? If the multi-stakeholder governance has some advantages, perhaps Coop's management risk and cost could be influenced by its size. The vaster the territorial presence of the organization, the lower the participation: members tend to feel distant from the organization and no longer feel they are

influencing the cooperative's management and consequently, participation in meetings and in decisions decreases; detachment from the cooperative management can lead to a similar detachment from the cooperative principles and the predominance of egotistical and economic objectives over principles of altruism and mutuality; the presence and control of a third party is required, of a manager that is totally dedicated to controlling processes and management, that also manages power autonomously with the risk of opportunism and of becoming detached from the true interests of the membership. If we were to conduct a comparative analysis between Coop and the small consumer cooperatives existing in some territories, the sense of consumer member participation would be different owing to the organizational size, characterized in the larger cooperatives by the member's more marked economic interests and consequently with greater costs and inefficiencies in governance in the large one compared to the small consumer cooperatives.

These risks and limits based on organizational size could be reduced through different member participation mechanisms and by the cooperative's expanded governance. In this way, the presence of volunteer-members can open up to a different sense of participation. The presence of volunteer-members can therefore represent the true added value for allowing also the large consumer cooperatives to remain close to the territory, to cultivate ideological principles and to keep the sense of member participation alive. This could represent the element capable of supporting active and direct control on the part of the members avoiding to totally delegate this task to the management.

Within these alternating economic and ideological aspects as well as goals based on efficient objectives and expanded mission, the need clearly emerges for examining the organization's and members' motivations referring to the contribution provided also by the theory of behavioural economics.

## 2. The theory of motivational complexity

As behaviour economics that developed in the 1990's taught us, there exist a myriad of motivations underlying human actions and it is limiting to assume that the economic players are moved only by economic motivations and by the desire to maximize their exclusive economic satisfaction. The economic literature also demonstrates that organizations can have different objectives and that corporate missions can shift to social interests or mutual interests that are not profit-based. By the same token, an individual can also have motivations that are different from maximizing his income. When speaking of a member of an organization, it is obvious to think that it is the individual himself writing the organizational mission and managing the organization according to certain principles. It is the group of individual members who decide the prevailing social rules in the organization and influence the conduct that the organization will have towards the market and its stakeholders. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the individual's cognitive scheme for creating an appropriate research tool for examining member motivation.

The first contribution provided by "behavioural economics" is the study of motivations. In particular, the theory distinguishes between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations.<sup>26</sup> The first emerge when the individual carries out an activity that allows him to obtain material recognition (tangible or verbal), so that satisfaction derives not for the action itself, but from its consequences; the typical example of this is remuneration. The second type of motivations emerge when an

---

<sup>26</sup> See for example Frey B. (2005), *Non solo per denaro*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano.



individual carries out an action that he considers interesting allowing him to directly draw a personal benefit essentially requiring the action to occur spontaneously, voluntarily and without any need of a condition for carrying it out; an example of this is carrying out an entertaining type of action. Both types of motivations increase the individual's personal satisfaction since they increase either the economic/extrinsic resources or the psychological satisfaction.

Altruistic motivations can also exist alongside with purely egotistical motivations. If the first are identified in any type of element – monetization and other – that give an exclusive sense of satisfaction and well-being to the person consuming such element, the latter represent the person's interest in generating satisfaction and well-being to others caused by his work. Altruism is one of the so-called preferences known as "other-regarding" expressed in a person taking an interest in the well-being and satisfaction of other individuals with whom interaction is occurring, or of the individuals in general that the person considers as being important in the context (i.e., beneficiaries of the services of his organization). Fairness and mutuality are therefore social preferences by definition. The concept of fairness is how results are distributed among people or with respect to a level of treatment that is considered fair (for example, differences between workers' salaries or the satisfaction of an organization that obtains high profits and economically exploited customers). Mutuality, contrarily, implies proper conduct when others also act properly and respond in a non-collaborative way when the other party does not meet his obligations and does not act properly. Altruism, fairness and mutuality indicate how behavioural economics can be explained by the way in which the players interact with others and by the way in which they compare themselves to the environment in which they operate. Observing the predominant social rules in one's community or in one's organization, the morality of others and the need to take action for the weaker ones, returning to the community a part of the resources available (also in terms of donating one's time) are all choices based on social preferences. They explain for donations, for moral obligations and for cooperative and solidarity dynamics. It has been demonstrated that cooperative behaviour as opposed to competitive behaviour, the alignment of objectives as opposed to having an individualized vision of them, actually lead to greater social well-being and satisfaction and to developing trust.

In addition to describing motivations, behavioural theory also helps us to understand how motivations and attitudes develop. First of all, it was demonstrated that individuals have their own motivations and their own personal/personality traits that influence their economic decisions. They search for those institutions and those contexts that best meet their expectations and motivations: the worker that has strong moral principles looks for a socially recognized job without any traces of illegalities; the volunteer searches for activities and organizations having a strong social content; individuals motivated by purely extrinsic aspects try to invest in actions that will give them high profits; etc. it is a sort of self-selecting mechanism: people with certain traits and characteristics tend to be selected in organizations having similar traits and characteristics, particularly regarding "values". Nonetheless, even interaction with the surrounding environment and learning the behaviour of others leads over time to forge the preferences, motivations and behaviour of the individuals. Conformist dynamics are revealed (people tend to follow behavioural rules present in society) and motivations are developed following a cognitive learning process. Learning from others and from institutions around us influence our decisions, either demotivating us or favouring our interests and consequently increasing our intrinsic motivation for taking action.

How useful can these considerations and definitions be for studying the motivations of volunteer members elected at Coop? First of all, as mentioned earlier, literature on volunteering

that emphasizes the altruistic component (viewing them mainly, if not exclusively, as “donators” or “pure altruists”) is limiting. More recent empirical analysis demonstrated that motivations underlying actions taken by any individual are complex and often dictated simultaneously by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, self-interested as well as altruistic. Also for the volunteers, it was observed that altruistic as well as partly self-interested motivations coexist and that a closer analysis indicates that the self-interested choices include both extrinsic aspects (such as money, career, benefits received) and intrinsic ones (such as autonomy, non-remuneration, interest for the activity carried out). If, generally speaking, volunteers can be motivated to carry out volunteering also based on seeking personal benefits, it is also true that volunteer members of a consumer cooperative could be attracted by material benefits such as products, or not only altruistic aspects. The premises of the behavioural analysis must therefore be considered in creating complete research tools that explore the broad range of motivations underlying the choice of becoming a volunteer member and that allow reaching a more accurate definition of volunteer member satisfaction and commitment.

Secondly, the behavioural analysis leads us to reflecting on how the cooperative can actually motivate or generally influence the behaviour of its members, not only through member policies, but also through transparent, fair and mutual management, based on trust and cooperation, of the relations with the organization’s stakeholders. It is sufficient to think how the volunteer member can feel motivated not only within a reality that offers great possibilities for involvement and personal recognition (individual incentives), but that is also attentive to his territory, that is innovative and based on ethical values similar to his own that strengthen his ideals. Studying the motivations of Coop’s member volunteers must be based on these assumptions and must examine the motivational trends and the perception of the member regarding his position and the organizational environment in general.

On the basis of these reflections, the next chapter will present the tools required in testing as completely and clearly as possible the motivations underlying member participation and the various facets of the psychological perception of participation. Egotistical and altruistic motivations will be examined as well as intrinsic and extrinsic ones, by creating a questionnaire based on validated constructs and by crossing over individual, work and organizational data. This latter phase will allow understanding the levers of member participation and of volunteer member commitment with especial regard to active involvement within the organization.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYTICAL PREMISES OF THE RESEARCH

#### 1. Which research tool and how to build it?

In order to obtain an assessment from people on a specific context or environment in which they are active, the research modalities can be differentiated. When deciding the type of method to be applied, it is necessary to consider the objectives to be reached and the sample of people that is being studied.

With respect to the objectives of this research, it is necessary to consider that:

- The intention is not to focus on specific problems of a working group or of a single cooperative, but to grasp the general characteristics of volunteering at Coop.
- Qualitative assessments should also be collected and not only quantitative ones.
- Many issues must be addressed and many specific questions must be raised, identifying in advance which are the “hottest” topics for volunteers and the cooperative.

With respect to the characteristics of the group of people to be contacted, it is necessary to consider that:

- The number of people to be involved in the sample must be quite high considering the size of the context (i.e., of the total of Coop’s elected volunteer members).
- Aiming at obtaining a national representation of those interviewed, it is necessary to involve people from cooperatives across the territory, doing so quickly and with limited costs.
- The opportunity must be given to volunteers to honestly express their opinions, without feeling controlled by the cooperative, nor traceable for characteristics.

These premises lead to identify advantages and disadvantages of the possible analysis tools:

- 1) the working groups, or “focus groups” are a qualitative research method where people are seated at a table to openly and freely discuss the topics raised by the group leader and questioning personal attitudes; the method fully responds to the need of discussing the most important management aspects, of collecting opinions that are qualitatively significant and of having opinions expressed broadly; nonetheless, management costs are very high when carried out on large samples and broad territories and this method does not allow concentrating the many responses in synthetic indexes also containing the opinions expressed by broader groups; it is more appropriate, therefore, for research on specific problems or on individual cooperatives;
- 2) individual interviews based on a guideline, even over the telephone, are a method used particularly by sociologists since it allows people to express their opinions openly and in detail; this method presents advantages regarding a strong personal element provided in the response as well as collecting a large amount of details, but risks being unfocused when people are not providing specific and precise answers to the question; this method also represents a very lengthy procedure and therefore applied particularly to small groups of people being interviewed, even if the solution of telephone interviews overcomes the barrier of distances;
- 3) the questionnaire is a tool used in social research (sociology, economics, opinion surveys) that collects information in a standardized way and on very large samples; the tool is formed by a structured set of questions and relative response categories of three types: (i) closed questions, when the responses are defined in advance by those preparing the questionnaire and the person interviewed is requested to identify a response among those presented that best meets his

opinion, (ii) open questions that do not establish pre-determined responses, but a blank space is left where it is possible to respond freely, (iii) questions on a numerical scale where an opinion is requested or a statement is to be made by assigning a numerical point. The questionnaire allows building a matrix of data (or dataset), with responses that are also qualitative and to then carry out a mathematical/statistical analysis preferably on large numbers. These characteristics identify in the questionnaire the tool that best adapts to large samples of people distributed across the territory and that also best expresses with synthetic indexes the general situation of a phenomenon or the general opinion of a group of people, while still representing a detailed analysis for sub-samples when the number of those interviewed is very high. The questionnaire also perfectly respects anonymity in this way solving the problem of providing an honest response, particularly if managed autonomously, for example, online; it does not, however, allow an accurate analysis of open questions which for this reason are usually very limited and simplified into closed questions that are often incomplete and incapable of fully representing the ideas and opinions of those being interviewed.

Owing to the research's objectives and the characteristics of the sample, the questionnaire was the tool adopted by the researchers for surveying the motivations and the member participation of Coop's elected volunteer members. Also wishing to examine the policies implemented by each cooperative and the opinions of the heads of the member policy sector of each cooperative, representing in this case a very small sample, the interview method chosen was based on individual telephone calls that allowed obtaining the specific territorial aspects as well as those of the sector heads based on open questions. These revealed important qualitative aspects and additional information.

The questionnaire included all three types of questions usually established (closed and numerical); the first were mainly used to describe the characteristics and role of the person interviewed, the second for allowing room for open conclusions regarding the cooperative and the policies to be implemented, the numerical scale questions for having those interviewed express a judgement on the principal topics being researched.

Focusing on the numerical scale questions that were the core of the research, reference was made to the national and international literature in order to draw as much as possible from the validated inventories.<sup>27</sup>

The following topics were addressed:

- a. Member participation motivations as volunteer members; referring to literature on members, the only research conducted for assessing member motivations were those by Birchall e

---

<sup>27</sup> The term "inventory" or "construct" identifies a set of items regarding a single question and aimed at identifying a unified dimension, an orderly group of elements that are typically correlated with each other providing on the whole the many different facets of that dimension. Therefore, the construct of work satisfaction is none other than the totality of all the elements that determine work satisfaction and must include all the various aspects that a worker considers when judging his level of satisfaction for his work: from salary to relations, from the treatment received to the working hours, from interest in the activity carried out to all the economic as well as other benefits, etc. Psychology bases many of the analyses on constructs since it contains a strong cognitive element. It is believed that a single concise question cannot effectively succeed in identifying the real perception and the facets of the person and it is therefore necessary to survey the same element with sub-dimensions.

Since the question can be perceived differently and individually and the cognitive aspect makes it difficult to identify all the possible sub-dimensions of the construct, the questions are validated. The researchers proceed to prepare sets of items that are very long and detailed, submitting them in different versions to both uniform and diverse groups that are needed as a test for the questionnaire and statistically verify the items were formulated correctly, included and "fitting", or presenting a significant correlation with each other. The following paragraph will present the brief validation modality created also for our questionnaire.

Simmons<sup>28</sup> that focused on participation; the constructs used in general literature for identifying economic motivations were psychological and referred to intrinsic motivations. An example of this was the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI), that represents the most detailed and validated construct of intrinsic motivation. It is, however: (i) incomplete since it does not consider economic motivations that for a member, instead, should be co-present together with the intrinsic ones; (ii) suited mainly to workers. Consequently, the construct was readapted and integrated, even though the IMI formula was respected and the identifying items of the sub-dimensions were used that were identified in the original construct. The IMI contains all the interest and recreational dimensions, competence, commitment, importance, tension, values and usefulness, perception of choice and of relations. For each one of these dimensions, the representative items were identified or slightly re-adapted and two extrinsic-economic items were added. Considering that the motivations can develop over time, the questionnaire proposed the same set of items both for motivations upon entering into the cooperative as well as those existing at the time of the interview in order to verify any changes; the two questions were joined with a summarizing construct regarding the sense of satisfaction of more general usefulness.

- b. The sense of belonging to the organization, explored not from the economic aspect, but from a psychological point of view; the principal reference literature is that by Van Dyne e Pierc,<sup>29</sup> a model that identifies seven elements for measuring the sense of belonging and more specifically, the psychological aspect, the identification and organizational internalization, satisfaction and involvement in one's work. Since some of these elements are surveyed in other parts of the questionnaire, the construct of belonging was grasped in its sub-dimensions of the psychological aspects, of organizational identification and of the organizational internalization and the items were adapted to the questionnaire related to the member figure; this allowed verifying to what extent the member feels he is an integral part of the organization sharing a common objective. To this construct the one was added based on identifying with the organization's and group's values in order to verify the alignment, or "fit" of the ideals and of the individual values with those of the cooperative and of other members.
- c. Satisfaction for a member's position and for the individual aspects of the relationship with the cooperative; this question was formulated based on the construct of work satisfaction adapted in Italy by Zaniboni et.al;<sup>30</sup> the construct is characterized for workers, by the presence of items that identify economic and other benefits, the relationship with the work dimension, satisfaction for the characteristics of one's position/placement, relational aspects, fairness of treatment; these sub-dimensions were considered and re-adapted to the members also obviously considering that the member himself also evaluates his level of satisfaction based on the material and psychological benefits obtained, for relations and type of treatment received and so on. Satisfaction is the most complex construct and as a result has the highest number of items (13 were used). It also briefly analyzes the developments experienced based on asking members interviewed if they feel more satisfied than when they first joined the cooperative and if this is related to an increased participation over time.

---

<sup>28</sup> Birchall J., Simmons R. (2004), "What motivates members to participate in co-operative and mutual businesses?", *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, vol.75, n.3, pp. 465-495.

<sup>29</sup> Van Dyne L., Pierce J. L. (2004), "Psychological ownership and feelings of possession: three field studies predicting employee attitudes and organizational citizenship behaviour", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25, pp. 439-459.

<sup>30</sup> Zaniboni S., Fraccaroli F., Corbiere M. (2010), "Work values of people with severe mental disorders registered in vocational programs: Validation of the work values questionnaire", *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, Vol. 29, 1, pp. 107-122.

d. The relationship with the organization and the commitment made over the short and long term period, with an organizational commitment survey; this construct is mainly used in surveys such as the work value survey and presents a series of summarizing and general items aimed at identifying work satisfaction on the whole, the commitment undertaken, the enjoyment in one's work or contrarily, the unhappiness with their work and loyalty. Even for this construct the sub-dimensions, the items were re-adapted to the figure of the member with small adjustments aimed at surveying the relationship over the short and long term period.

Along with these main inventories, it was deemed appropriate to include other questions aimed at surveying aspects that can be strongly related to the aspects presented up to now, as being possible determining factors in the sense of belonging or of satisfaction, or of their possible consequences. In this way inventories were included aimed at surveying: (1) the pursuit of behavior that goes beyond the role for which the member is present in the cooperative, identifying behavior that is promoted autonomously based on a sense of duty or on a particular interest going beyond one's tasks; they identify a higher member involvement than what is normally expected and consequently a complete and full participation in the cooperative's objectives; (2) the personality traits (or the "big five") that are used in literature for understanding if a selection effect exists regarding the individual's participation in various organizational sectors and therefore, in our case, if the volunteers present similar characteristics based on a high degree of altruism and desire for interaction, or if there exist differences among the members involved; (3) the levels of trust surveyed through a construct that is typically applied by economists and in experimental analyses and aimed at examining the general sense of trust representing for researchers a greater willingness for cooperation for reaching the common or collective well-being and a greater predisposition for using resources towards member satisfaction.

Once the principal inventories were identified, the questionnaire was then divided into 5 sections created for tracing the person's physical and psychological profile within the cooperative:

Section I – The position of Coop's elected volunteer member that examines the relationship as a consumer member observing the frequency of exchanges, as a volunteer member also looking at tasks carried out as a lending member and as a member holding another organizational role such as councillor or coordinator; the section addresses the cognitive value of the role within the cooperative surveying the perceptions of oneself within the cooperative and the behaviour outside of one's specific role.

Section II – The initial contact and the motivations for becoming a member, surveyed according to the constructs of intrinsic and economic motivations analyzing the modalities according to which the member entered into contact with the cooperative, crossing over these observations with the presence of competitors holding the same role in the territory.

Section III – Member participation surveyed according to the constructs of belonging and identification as mentioned above and mainly analyzed in terms of frequency of participation, motivation underlying member participation in meetings and in non-participation.

Section IV – Satisfaction and future prospects at Coop, based on the psychological complexities and joining with the numerical scales various closed and open questions regarding the future at Coop in terms of policies that the volunteers perceive as being urgent and to be implemented also as possible tools for improving internal management.

Section V – Personal information representing control variables, namely, differentiation elements for understanding if responses are influenced by personal characteristics rather than organizational ones, or vice-versa; the numerical scale questions on personal information are part of this section as well as many closed questions regarding gender, age, education, member work

position and a control question on active member involvement also in other organizations that produce corporate capital across the territory.

The questionnaire structured in this way represented our principal survey tool and it will be discussed further in the following paragraph. The questionnaire was combined with another phase of the research addressed to elected volunteer members that surveyed Coop's territorial policies and that was elaborated by Coop's heads of the member policy sectors in the form of interviews based on guidelines.

## 2. Is this a good questionnaire?

To understand whether the questionnaire initially drafted represented an appropriate tool for the survey, which is also understandable and easy to use, it was tested in advance on a small sample of elected volunteer members from a cooperative that volunteered to collaborate. 14 people were interviewed with a response return rate of 78% compared to the initial sample selected. This allowed first of all to identify any questions with a low response return rate which would have been eliminated owing to the difficulty in understanding the question or the unwillingness to respond. In this respect, it was observed that those interviewed did not hesitate providing judgements on the cooperative and on activities, nor on personal information; the response return rate was not significantly different for certain questions, indicating that all the people interviewed succeeded in completing the questionnaire. The principal observations that emerged concerned the following:

- the presence of three questions that caused various perplexities among those interviewed, regarding their future position in the cooperative, the modalities that occurred for their becoming members, the possible policies for attracting new members; changes were made to the above-mentioned questions;
- identifying the questions having the highest response return rate: the return rate resulted quite uniform, but typically responses were provided more willingly to questions included in sections I and II;
- identifying questions considered problematic by those interviewed: only two people commented on the difficulty of interpreting various sets of questions posed on a scale from 1 to 7; where possible, the scales were therefore replaced requesting to indicate only three principal aspects;
- general observations of those interviewed in the questionnaire: 5 people found the questionnaire to be interesting, an opportunity for expressing themselves as members and also useful for better understanding the role they held; 3 people criticized the length (one more adamantly) and suggested (2 people) to simplify the multiple choice questions; 3 questions were eliminated from the questionnaire's original version that were not significant to the analysis, were redundant and difficult to understand;
- the statements made on the level of difficulty in responding to the questionnaire: 10 people stated there was no difficulty, or only a minimum level (less than 3 responses on a scale from 1 to 7) and only 2 people stated there was a high level of difficulty (assigning a level of 5); following the simplification of the questionnaire, no other changes were made;
- the statements made regarding the level of difficulty in filling out the questionnaire online: 11 people stated they had no difficulty since knowledgeable in the use of computers; 2 people had no difficulty even if not knowledgeable in the use of computers; 1 person had some difficulty;

no one stated that it was difficult and that it would have been better to fill out the hard copy. Notwithstanding the above, a hard copy was also included that was easy to fill out and that could be submitted along with the web mode;

- the statements made regarding the time required for filling out the online questionnaire: most of those interviewed stated it took them 20 minutes, with a maximum of 45 minutes for the person that was not knowledgeable in computers; simplifying the questionnaire reduced the online filling out of the questionnaire to 15-17 minutes;
- analyzing the connection within the set of questions from on a scale from 1 to 7 allowed identifying any items to be simplified and in this way various constructs were reduced so that each one was not formed by more than 10 items (with the exception of the question regarding satisfaction) and with an average of 7 items per construct. Redundant topics were eliminated whose correlation to the other items present in the construct was more than 0.9.

After the first test, a final questionnaire was drawn up that was slightly simplified, but absolutely unchanged in its objectives, sections and constructs. Since it was structured on the basis of constructs and questions re-adapted based on literature and often applied originally to workers, as well as presenting the questionnaire with a large number of specific questions, we feel that for the sake of scientific transparency it is necessary to propose a re-validation, even a simple one, of the constructs used. The assessment of the validity of the questionnaire in its final version is possible by referring to all the data collected (that will be presented in the next chapter) and by conducting two statistical analyses of reliability.

A first assessment was carried out through the factor analysis that identifies if the construct used is formed by more sub-constructs or dimensions. In detail, the factor analysis is presented as statistical method for tracing the question to a single group of variables (items), to one or more common dimensions of the variables, correlated among each other and whose number is lower than the original variables. For most of the constructs adopted in the questionnaire, the factor analysis revealed the difficulty in dividing the sets of items into sub-dimensions and presented a considerable internal correlation among most of the items of the constructs used.

It is also interesting to observe that generating sub-dimensions particularly characterized the question on member motivation (Table 3.1). The question regarding motivation upon entrance was formulated by highlighting any intrinsic and extrinsic components, according to the definitions included in literature. However, the factor analysis also clearly revealed two different components underlying motivations for membership in the cooperative and for remaining in the cooperative: the value dimension and the individualistic dimension, or personal advantage. The first dimension includes the items of expressing the desire to do something ideal for others (sharing Coop's values, doing something for the territory and for the needy); the second dimension includes personal benefits that the member obtains from his participation, both extrinsic and economic (benefits for himself and for his family) and intrinsic-relational (interacting with people, sense of self-esteem, etc.).

Examining the question on satisfaction, the items are associated with a single dimension and it is particularly difficult to find sub-constructs since they tend to be isolated with the single items, such as economic benefits and distributional fairness. The factor analysis indicates the constructs used are sufficiently valid, but require further verification through testing the complexity of the items used each time in the questions.



**Table 3.1 - Example of factor analysis of the motivations upon entering the cooperative (2 dimensions)\***

<b>Elements</b>	<b>1st dimension</b>	<b>2nd dimension</b>
Sharing Coop's values	0.39	<b>0.52</b>
Willingness to do something for the territory	0.45	<b>0.62</b>
Doing something for needy people	0.44	<b>0.52</b>
Accessibility to the place	<b>0.55</b>	-0.20
Implementing the curriculum	<b>0.61</b>	-0.30
Economic individual benefits	<b>0.58</b>	-0.51
Economic benefits and opportunities for the family	<b>0.57</b>	-0.54
Active participation in the Coop	<b>0.49</b>	0.30
Individuation in the workplace	<b>0.67</b>	-0.39
Interacting with people	<b>0.67</b>	0.31
Self-esteem	<b>0.66</b>	0.13
Other recognition	<b>0.71</b>	-0.13
Relations and new friendships	<b>0.69</b>	0.14

\* The elements belong to a sub-dimension when the correlation coefficient is higher than that recorded in the other dimensions and higher than 0.500; the higher the correlation coefficient, the higher the correlation between the variable and the dimension.

Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire

The second procedure used is aimed at verifying the reliability and loyalty of the construct, assessed through the study of Cronbach's Alpha. This is none other than a consistency index based on the average of the correlation along all the items of a construct and is used often in psychological analyses for measuring reliability of a scale, or of its internal coherence. The test was applied to the majority of the constructs (Table 3.2) and confirms the validity of the questions posed. The Alpha is always the same or higher than 0.8 and the satisfaction and "extra-role" behaviour constructs are particularly good. The identification and commitment constructs are highly reliable when from these sets of questions the items are removed that emerged in the factor analysis as being extraneous to the construct (in particular, in identification when identifying with the organization is analyzed and not with the group) or when the scale of items is reversed (for example, in the question on commitment, the value stated for the item "I tend not to tell others that I am a Coop member") is reversed.

**Table 3.2 - Example of construct reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)**

<b>Elements</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
Extra-role behaviour	0,884
Motivation upon entering the cooperative	0,835
Current motivation	0,846
Intrinsic motivations	0,875
Elements of member participation	0,876
Organizational commitment	0,870
Identification	0,897
Satisfaction	0,911
Commitment	0,797

Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the questionnaire constructed is reliable and sufficiently complete, even if, obviously, researchers and Coop representatives may find some questions unanswered insofar as not addressed in the questionnaires.

## CHAPTER IV

### EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS ON ELECTED VOLUNTEER MEMBERS AND RESULTS

#### 1. The sample

The research's objective was to hold interviews with a sample of elected volunteer members that was statistically representative. What does this mean? The individuals can be grouped according to categories that can explain the differences in actions, in perceptions and consequently in the responses collected. A statistical analysis, to be considered representative of the objective of the research, must therefore consider the differences among individuals and use samples that include representation criteria of the various groups of people.

For the purposes of this research, it was felt that the judgment expressed by the sample population could be influenced both by the cooperative's characteristics as well as the individual's own characteristics. With regard to the cooperative, the most commonly used statistical criteria for differentiating among organizational groups were those based on location and corporate size. These criteria were adopted in this research and the cooperatives were grouped (Table 4.1) according to territory, distinguishing between Adriatic District, Northwest District and Tyrrhenian District. Within each area, an effort was made to obtain a good representation of the 12 member sections also based on size, distinguishing among the small member sections, containing less than 10 elected members, medium member sections, with 11-19 elected members and large member sections with over 19 elected members. The member sections as a whole were sub-divided into 9 categories (3 areas for 3 sizes) and the sections contacted for administering the questionnaires were randomly selected based on a statistical procedure.

**Table 4.1 - Member sections area**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Number of volunteer members</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>Up to 10</b>	<b>11 - 18</b>	<b>19 and over</b>	
Adriatic	29	48	41	<b>118</b>
NorthWest	57	72	18	<b>147</b>
Tyrrhenian	23	44	37	<b>104</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>369</b>

*Source: our processing of data collected from the Cooperative questionnaire*

The sample of member sections selected was equivalent to 52 units, whose subdivision according to grouping is illustrated in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2 - Member sections sample**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Number of volunteer members</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>Up to 10</b>	<b>11 - 18</b>	<b>19 and over</b>	
Adriatic	4	8	6	<b>18</b>
NorthWest	7	9	3	<b>19</b>
Tyrrhenian	4	6	5	<b>15</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>52</b>

*Source: our processing from the Cooperative questionnaire*

Compared to the representation according to member characteristics, there were 2 criteria that could be adopted: one structured, the other simplified. With respect to the first modality, the member area was analyzed in the fundamental characteristics (gender, age, seniority in the

cooperative) and a representative sample of these criteria was selected that also crossed over with organizational variables. This procedure, however, would have led to an excessive fragmentation of the member section as a whole and its consequent sample. The alternative chosen was to rely on the statistic randomness of the selection based only on the organizational criteria. This meant that owing to the member sections selected, a questionnaire was administered to all the members of the section so as to have a random representation of the elected volunteer members as a whole. Since the sample was formed by a sufficiently high number of people, owing to the principle of randomness, they could represent in a statistically significant way the member section as a whole without risking that those interviewed would select themselves.

Once the member sections were selected to be surveyed, the sample of individuals to be interviewed was formed by 830 elected volunteer members distributed in 52 member sections selected according to organizational size (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3 - Distribution of the sample of volunteer members to be interviewed**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Number of volunteer members</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>Up to 10</b>	<b>11 - 18</b>	<b>19 and over</b>	
Adriatic	33	129	140	<b>302</b>
NorthWest	59	140	76	<b>275</b>
Tyrrhenian	30	102	121	<b>253</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>830</b>

Source: our processing

663 people responded to the questionnaire with a return rate equal to 79.9%, an excellent result if compared with the average of the responses for the sample surveys. The questionnaires were mostly filled out in the hard copy, while only 1.8% filled out the questionnaire online (accessing the link). Most of the questionnaires (93.7%) was filled out in all its parts, while for the remaining percentage, only the last questions regarding personal characteristics were not answered. The missing cases were however very few and the questions with the lowest response return rate regarded participation in meetings.

**Table 4.4 - Distribution of the volunteer members sample interviewed according to cooperative**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Coop Adriatica	67	10.1
Coop Amiatina	22	3.3
Coop Centro-Italia	46	6.9
Coop Estense	79	12.0
Unicoop Firenze	71	10.7
Coop Liguria	51	7.7
Coop Lombardia	62	9.4
Coop Nordest	63	9.5
Nova Coop	87	13.1
Coop Reno	15	2.3
Unicoop Tirreno	60	9.0
Coop Unione di Trezzo sull'Adda	26	3.9
Mancante	14	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: our elaborations

The sample of those that responded was distributed in a sufficiently aligned way compared to the selected sample. Even if information was unavailable regarding the cooperative of origin, 14 (2.1%) of the people interviewed were distributed quite evenly with a sufficient amount of people

for each cooperative (Table 4.4) and a uniform territorial distribution, with 33.9% of those interviewed in the Adriatic District, 34.1% in the Northwest and 30% in the Tyrrhenian District.

57.6% of those interviewed were males; 38.9% had high school diplomas while only 13.5% of the total had university degrees; the average age was quite high, considering that only 16% of the elected volunteer members were under 45, 28.4% was between 46 and 60 and the absolute majority (55.7%) was over 60. In line with the distribution according to age group, it was noted that retirees are the dominant presence at Coop: 61.8% of those interviewed are retired, only a few are students (0.8%) and housewives (4.4%) and a surprising presence of volunteer members have a job and volunteer at Coop in addition to their external remunerated employment (30.9%, of which only 20 people are free lance or independent workers). Seniority of the elected volunteer members is quite high since only 9.3% of those interviewed held the position for a maximum of 5 years, one fourth for less than 10 years and 30% were elected members for more than 20 and less than 30 years and 15.2% for over 30 years. A profile that delineated the world of volunteering at Coop characterized by a high loyalty and by a high level of continuity and involvement, but that suffers from its low capability of attracting young members and finding new recruits to replace the outflow of elected members in the near future.

**Table 4.5 - Characteristics of the volunteer members interviewed**

	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>GENDER</b>	
Female	42.4
Male	57.6
<b>AGE</b>	
Under 45	16.0
From 45 to 60	28.4
Over 60	55.6
<b>EDUCATION</b>	
Elementary school	13.7
Middle school	25.2
Professional training (3 years)	14.1
High school diploma (5 years)	33.5
University degree or post-graduate degrees	13.5
<b>PROFESSIONAL CONDITION</b>	
Employee	26.8
Economically dependent worker	0.9
Free lancer	3.2
Unemployed	2.1
Retired	61.8
Housewife	4.4
Student	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire*

Along with the typical socio-demographic characteristics describing the sample, it is interesting to note the personality traits of the elected volunteer members. If the personality analysis is rather peculiar within the research context, it nonetheless allowed understanding if the people chosen were “pure altruists”, those types of volunteers described in economic literature as those willing to donate their time for others and having high levels of cooperation, altruism, interaction capabilities, or contrarily, if these people were volunteer members having very different traits, but all sharing an interest for the activity proposed. The predominant trait among the volunteer members was recorded as being altruism, being open and aware to social problems (an average of 6 out of volunteer members identified with this trait) and the majority of the people considered

themselves reliable and disciplined (a 5.8 average). Volunteer members were also curious and open to novelties, seen as a trait that allows bringing innovation through volunteering. Greater differences existed among volunteer members (with lower average scores, but above all from a higher standard deviation) regarding extroverted qualities, searching for personal realization and confidentiality. These differences were explained not only based on gender (men and women often presenting different traits), but above all on age.

The fact that volunteer members are open and altruistic partly explains the responses regarding the levels of trust they expressed. In addition to identifying themselves as being generally reliable (an average score of 5.6 points on a scale from 1 to 7), the members interviewed stated on average that they can trust others in general and even if the points given to this aspect were not very high (4.2) the result was nonetheless higher than the one recorded in other surveys and accompanied by very low consensus regarding the statement that others can never be trusted (2,3) and by a high consensus regarding the statement that others can be trusted when people prove they are reliable (5).

## **2. The nature of the relationship with the cooperative**

The relationship with the cooperative can be verified through numerous indicators: from the type of material and psychological exchanges with the cooperative, to the identification of the type of exchange with the cooperative, to implementing tasks that are required or not required by one's role, to the willingness to engage in member participation and be actively involved.

First of all, the relationship with the cooperative can be influenced by local competitive characteristics. Consequently, we see that the territory in which the volunteers interviewed operate is characterized by the presence of many supermarkets and hypermarkets of both cooperative and non-cooperative type: 64% of those interviewed indicated the presence of private supermarkets, 29.2% the presence of cooperative supermarkets, but different from Coop and this cooperative has in 41.5% cases, many stores across the territory. Owing to its competitive structure, it is interesting to observe that above all, in those areas where different types of cooperative supermarkets are present, if the possibility did not exist of becoming members and the relationship with the supermarket was purely commercial (48.2% of the cases), nearly half of the people (47.8%) could become members, but did not, while only 4% chose to become members even in the other cooperative present in the territory. This indicated a sense of loyalty and of belonging to a single reality that was strengthened by the fact that the other structures would never have guaranteed services to their members similar to those offered by their own cooperative (according to the statements made by 59.5% of those interviewed).

The strong, almost exclusive, relationship with the cooperative was also proved by the frequency of purchases made from Coop, rather than from other supermarkets or hypermarkets: 60.8% of those interviewed stated they always shop at Coop and an additional 34.7% stated they shop at Coop very often, while only very few volunteer members have only sporadic commercial relations with the cooperative.

Moreover, observing the specific nature of the relationship between the cooperative and the elected volunteer members, it was noted that in 68% of the cases, lending members also contribute to the member loans, demonstrating a high level of economic involvement, but above all, complete trust in the cooperative's activities. They also frequently held positions within the cooperative: 12.1% of the elected volunteer members interviewed is also a member of the Board of Directors or

of the Supervisory Body, 25.7% is a coordinator of the member groups for carrying out specific activities within the cooperative, 63.1% holds different positions, such as member of the Executive Committee, of the Store Committee or of the Ethical Committee, while – considering the possibility that a member holds more than one of these positions – 37.7% held no other additional position within the cooperative outside of his role of elected volunteer member.

**Table 4.6 - Self-perception within the cooperative by education level (average figures)**

<i>I feel myself as...</i>	<i>Compulsory education</i>	<i>Professional training</i>	<i>High school diploma</i>	<i>University degree</i>	<i>Total</i>
One of the members	5.39	5.51	5.30	5.64	5.41
A member that influences cooperative policies	3.36	3.45	3.24	3.38	3.37
A customer having a privileged relationship	3.34	3.48	3.45	4.11	3.51
One of the many customers	3.76	3.50	3.50	3.08	3.57
A citizen of the community in which the Coop operates	4.91	5.00	4.76	4.97	4.87

Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire

Overall, this data leads to reflections that can be made on Coop's volunteer member perception: does he sees himself more as a member, as a volunteer, or as a cooperative customer? The response to this question (Table 4.6), revealed that the greatest self-perception was that of considering themselves as cooperative members (average evaluation of 5.4 on the scale from 1 to 7 where 1 stood for "I don't see myself at all in this role" and 7 "I completely see myself in this role"), even if the self-perception was also strongly based on considering themselves as citizens of the community where the cooperative is active (an average of 4.9) that indicated that the member intends to represent the voice of the territory and express volunteer action carried out for and within one's community. On the contrary, members have a very low perception of themselves exclusively as customers (an average of 3.5), as the perception is of being a member that greatly influences internal cooperative policies (3.4). Interestingly enough, while no significant differences were recorded regarding the perception between men and women according to age groups, volunteers with higher education degrees see themselves as being customers having a privileged relationship compared to volunteers with a lower level of education and the same vision was stated by lending members that consider themselves as having a relationship with the cooperative that is more intensive even under the commercial profile.

Most of the elected volunteer members was involved in the cooperative mainly through participation and in the organization of meetings (activities carried out by 75.5% of those interviewed), but often the volunteer members also supported the organization of different events within the cooperative (48%) and were available for managing relations and communication activities with the territory (32%) also promoting Coop's activities (24.6%). With respect to projects promoted by Coop, the elected volunteer members were mainly involved in tasks verifying the quality and functionality of the *Approvati dai Membri* (a project involving 27.6% of the total) or in promoting fair trade products part of the *Fa la spesa giusta* (shopping the right way) project, while less than 10% was involved in other projects such as *Buon fine* or *Brutti ma Buoni* for managing unsold merchandise and *Ausilio* (help) for home deliveries.

If analyzing tasks allowed assessing the commitment in carrying out strictly practical activities, it is interesting to observe the self-perception of the members in the "in-role" dynamics and above all in the "extra-role behaviour". Both elements were assessed through a specific question that included the different facets of action carried out. It clearly identified a high level of volunteer participation in activities defined as extra-role and in particular in the willingness to transmit to



others the cooperative's ideals and values (an average of 5 on a scale from 1 to 7), in the trends connected with internal and external communication and in the increase of knowledge (an average higher than 4.7 points assigned to the items that describe the member as interested in speaking with outside people to convince them to become members, to offer suggestions to others for having the cooperative work as best as possible, to keep informed on themes useful to the cooperative and to promote activities that can improve the satisfaction within the cooperative). If the average points are only partially explained, it is interesting to observe that one fourth of those interviewed feel very involved in these activities (an average of 6 or 7 points). Moreover, extra-role activities were equally felt by men and women, workers and retirees, even if – based on expectations – the elderly members were the ones promoting extra-role activities particularly because of their experience allowing them to best transmit consolidated principles and motivations. Curiously enough, the greatest differences emerged comparing the members that were also lending members at Coop with those that did not participate as lending members: the first are definitely more willing to have new members join, to help other members and to transmit Coops' ideals and values, to communicate with the outside world and help improve cooperative climate. These elements lead to assuming that participating as lending members was not connected to considerations based on economic advantages, but on the contrary, was perceived as a loan granted to one's cooperative to also economically support its investments in the territory and for creating a complete exchange with Coop.

**Table 4.7 - In-role and extra-role activities by volunteering seniority (average figure)**

	<5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	20-30 years	>30 years	Average
Joining new members	3.78	4.01	4.36	4.11	4.27	4.16
Helping others for the benefit of the co-op	4.02	4.18	4.42	4.31	4.57	4.34
Transmit the co-op's values and mission	4.65	5.07	5.17	4.91	5.40	5.07
Give suggestions to people for the co-op benefit	4.60	4.64	4.75	4.58	4.85	4.69
Convincing people to join the co-op	4.30	4.71	4.97	4.68	4.78	4.75
Convincing people to join the co-op	4.64	5.06	4.83	4.62	4.87	4.79
Improving the sense of satisfaction at Coop	4.71	4.85	4.87	4.67	5.05	4.82
Doing only what strictly required	3.78	3.92	4.38	4.07	4.80	4.22

Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire

When joining Coop, prior to being elected volunteer members, most of those interviewed did not have a consumer member relationship with Coop (62.1%), while only a few were consumers without a membership card (21.3%); passing from a non-elected volunteer member to an elected one occurred for only 9% of those interviewed and only a very small percentage of member volunteers were employees of the cooperative (6%) or had no relations with the cooperative (1.5%). Volunteer members were elected owing to the encouragement by people that already volunteered at Coop (the access modality for 62.1% of those interviewed), or because the cooperative directly proposed elected membership for the territorial campaign for renewing the territorial representational bodies (41.2%). It is interesting to note that spreading information does not occur only through direct modalities on the part of the cooperative (one fourth of those interviewed), but it is often assigned to informal communication modalities among people across the territory and not only for the above mentioned involvement promoted by those volunteering at Coop, but also for the proposal submitted by other bodies and organizations of the territory or by the widespread mechanism of "word of mouth".

### 3. Member motivation

A central aspect in assessing the sense of volunteering at Coop was studying motivations that led to becoming member in particular regarding elected volunteer members, with an institutionally well defined role central to the context being analyzed. As stated in the introduction of the research and its objectives, analyzing motivations was particularly interesting because Coop's volunteer members are theoretically complex, representing a profile between that of a consumer cooperative member and that of a member of a structure that is attentive to external consequences produced, between the role of consumer and of volunteer. It is expected that these two dimensions are also included in the motivations that urge member participation, delineating a mix between extrinsic motivations (or economical) and intrinsic ones (or ideological and linked to an interest for the activity). Both aspects were considered in formulating the question on becoming member and the question was also assessed by those interviewed from the time they became members up to now. This allowed obtaining a more approximate evaluation of how motivations developed over time and of the risk of losing certain motivations, or of the re-emergence of other ideological elements regarding extrinsic components.

The data analyzed (Table 4.8) highlighted the predominance of intrinsic motivations over the extrinsic ones. The principal motivations that caused the members to become volunteer members were based on sharing Coop values (average points of 5.7), the willingness to do something for one's territory (average points of 5.5) and the possibility of doing something for the needy (5.2). Aspects based on relations were also important according to the possibility of interacting with others and of forging new friendships (average points of 4.8 and 4.6, respectively). Active participation in decision-making processes also drew people to the cooperative, obtaining an average of 4.4 points, in line with the sense of self-esteem that is obtained from being volunteer members. Economical reasons were not at all present among the motivations for initiating member participation, as were not purchase coupons and other benefits for oneself and for one's family (average points of 2.3 and 1.9, respectively), nor where indirect extrinsic benefits such as the possibility of developing useful contacts for one's professional future, or obtaining a new experience to be included in one's curriculum (points lower than 2). Data led to stating that the altruistic motivation (indexed in the three first aspects and represented by the motivations regarding satisfaction and well-being generated for others) was decidedly higher than any personal (or self) motivation, particularly extrinsic (expressed by other values); relations/interaction were the only personal benefit (or motivation) the elected volunteer members wished to receive from membership in their cooperative.

Comparing differences among people, it was observed that male and female members were joined by identical motivations, with the exception of women being more slightly oriented to cooperative membership for obtaining greater social visibility and based on a more conformist logic, dictated by the opportunity for carrying out an activity that was considered important by one's acquaintances (3.9 points against 3.5 assigned by the males). The people with a lower level of education and the elderly were motivated also by the fact that the cooperative was located in a nearby area and easily accessible, as well as by the fact of receiving purchase coupons, while the people with a higher level of education and employed, attributed minimum levels of importance to economic benefits and to extrinsic motivations in general. Elderly and less educated people presented a myriad of motivations, even if the altruistic/interaction components predominated over the economic ones. For the educated youth, altruistic motivations prevailed, even in line with



this volunteer groups' greater possibilities of obtaining outside of the cooperative satisfaction based on interaction, competence and income. Only the younger age groups were distinguished for their interest in developing, thanks to Coop, a type of training enhancing one's personal curriculum and future professional opportunities. Lastly, observing the different motivations based on seniority within the cooperative, no significant differences emerged between volunteers that just joined and elderly volunteers, standing to demonstrate the fact that motivations upon joining the Cooperative did not change over time and Coop continued attracting members still on the basis of altruistic and unselfish motivations.

**Table 4.8 - Motivations underlying the decision to become elected volunteer members at the cooperative by age (average figures)**

	<b>&lt; 45</b>	<b>46-60</b>	<b>&gt; 60</b>	<b>Total</b>
Sharing Coop's values	5.57	5.64	5.68	<b>5.65</b>
Willingness to do something for the territory	5.79	5.56	5.38	<b>5.50</b>
Doing something for needy people	5.26	5.13	5.14	<b>5.16</b>
Accessibility to the place	3.20	3.41	3.72	<b>3.53</b>
Implementing the curriculum	3.30	2.04	2.24	<b>2.38</b>
Economic individual benefits	2.00	1.98	2.59	<b>2.30</b>
Active participation in the Coop	4.68	4.09	4.46	<b>4.39</b>
Individuation in the workplace	2.65	2.08	2.29	<b>2.29</b>
Economic benefits and opportunities for the family	2.08	1.64	1.98	<b>1.89</b>
Interacting with people	4.34	4.51	5.14	<b>4.82</b>
Self-esteem	3.63	3.95	4.60	<b>4.23</b>
Other recognition	3.01	3.51	4.00	<b>3.67</b>
Relations and new friendships	4.21	4.36	4.81	<b>4.57</b>

*Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire*

Analyzing the current motivations, the people interviewed presented a continuity of motivations: none of the values that were stated upon joining the cooperating changed significantly and the predominance of altruistic motivations was recorded over non-economic intrinsic ones and lastly, over extrinsic-economical motivations. Despite the perfect homogeneity of results indicated a partial inability of those interviewed to retrace their real motivations for becoming members, this also represented an indicator of the consciousness of cooperative elected volunteer members to continue supporting their initial motivations and value altruistic motivations. The only significant data was represented by the perception of the members with a higher education to have increasingly developed their altruistic motivations based on their willingness to remain to be able to do something for their territory (average points higher than 6).

The presence of strong intrinsic motivations, intended as a demonstrated interest for the activities and satisfaction in carrying them out was lastly surveyed through a specific question having a general nature. Data confirmed that on the average, those interviewed "very much liked to be elected volunteer members at Coop" (a consensus of 5.4 on a scale from 1 to 7) both because being a member "has a social usefulness" and because "it can lead to non-egotistical values to emerge" (average points of 5.4 for both). The role of active volunteer member was perceived as an "important role" (an average of 5.3) for which the members feel "they are greatly committed to" (average points of 4.9). In addition to the average figures, the standard deviation for all the aspects considered was sufficiently low, standing to indicate that people were not positioned at the extremes, but all the responses were concentrated along average-high figures.

Even for this question the differences in the perceptions among groups of elected non-volunteer members were highly significant. A more positive perception was recorded among the members with university degrees in finding within their activities a way for having non-egotistical values re-emerge. The elderly volunteer members had a greater stated commitment and a greater perception in holding an important role for the cooperative. Those having an external job had a lower sense of satisfaction in carrying out volunteering at Coop (average points of 5 against 5.5 recorded among the retirees and 5.7 of the housewives) and their commitment was also less. (average points of 4.5). Lastly, among the lending members, all the motivations were more marked indicating a grater intrinsic-emotional involvement in the cooperative.

**Table 4.9 - Intrinsic motivations of being volunteer members at Coop by age (average figures)**

	< 45	46-60	> 60	Total
Sense of enjoyment	5.19	5.26	5.51	<b>5.38</b>
Sense of commitment	4.66	4.66	5.09	<b>4.89</b>
Social usefulness of its own role	5.48	5.33	5.42	<b>5.40</b>
Importance for the re-emergence of non-egotistical values	5.21	5.33	5.41	<b>5.35</b>
Non-economic benefits received	3.78	3.64	3.82	<b>3.76</b>
Importance of its own role	5.01	5.23	5.37	<b>5.27</b>

Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire

#### 4. Member participation at Coop

For surveying elected volunteer member participation at the cooperative it was necessary to understand if their relationship with the cooperative was simply as people pursuing their own objectives rather than being involved in reaching organizational objectives. The analysis was conducted step by step through a series of constructs that provided a complete vision of the sense of member participation.

The first question examined the sense of psychological belonging. Data indicated that the elected volunteer members feel they “are part” of the cooperative (5.5 points out of a scale from 1 to 7) and they expressed a strong sense of psychological belonging. This was strengthened above all by a significant “voice” power (judging the possibility of expressing to the cooperative any disagreement regarding action modalities 5.6) and by a psychological satisfaction that a sense of belonging generates (in response to the statement “I feel at ease in this role” all those interviewed expressed an average level of agreement of 5.3). The sense of psychological belonging was not however determined or strengthened by the success of a sense of self-entrepreneurship (4.1 points attributed to this trend) nor by the fact that the role of member helps better defining one’s own sense of identity (3.7 points). Members see themselves as having complementary roles to those of the other cooperative members (consensus of 4.7) and of contributing to the overall operation (consensus of 4.4) even if humbly it was believed that it was not possible to make a significant difference. Observing the differences among groups, it was interesting to note that: males presented an average sense of psychological belonging that was slightly higher than the one expressed by women; members with a lower level of education felt a greater sense of self-definition and self-entrepreneurship with respect to those having a higher level of education, as if the cooperative offered them through their member participation a social identification, noted particularly among the people with fewer means; seniority in cooperative service (more so than the age of those interviewed) positively and significantly impacted the member’s sense of being part of the cooperative (with points ranging from 5 attributed by the members elected with less

than 5 years of service to 5.9 for the members elected with over 30 years of service), of transforming the cooperative's success into a personal success (from 3.9 to 4.7) and defining oneself (from 3.5 to 4.2).

**Table 4.10 - Levels of psychological belonging by volunteering seniority (average figures)**

<i>I believe that...</i>	<b>&lt;5 years</b>	<b>6-10 years</b>	<b>11-20 years</b>	<b>20-30 years</b>	<b>&gt;30 years</b>	<b>Total</b>
my capabilities can contribute to the success of my co-op	4.58	4.45	4.40	4.23	4.49	<b>4.39</b>
my presence can make a positive difference in my co-op	4.12	3.94	4.07	3.86	4.17	<b>4.01</b>
my action complements that carried out by other members	4.92	4.78	4.76	4.69	4.69	<b>4.75</b>
I would not hesitate to express my disagreement if my co-op was doing something wrong	5.37	5.76	5.72	5.42	5.46	<b>5.56</b>
I am part of this co-op	5.05	5.38	5.52	5.44	5.90	<b>5.49</b>
I feel at ease in my role within this co-op	4.94	5.31	5.43	5.28	5.69	<b>5.36</b>
this co-op's success is also my success	3.87	4.12	4.10	4.07	4.69	<b>4.17</b>
Being a member of this co-op helps me in better defining my identity	3.54	3.46	3.65	3.66	4.14	<b>3.69</b>

*Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire*

No significant differences were recorded in the same question between retired people and workers, but the very few students present stated having a high level of psychological belonging; lastly, in line with an all-round greater involvement in the cooperative, the lending members had a sense of greater psychological belonging compared to a feeling of feeling at ease and feeling as a part of the organization (with a gap of 0.4 points compared to non-lending members).

Along with the member's perception of belonging, objective data was also collected regarding the level of member participation. On the average, the members interviewed participated in 13 meetings a year, including shareholders' meetings, management meetings, committee meetings, etc. In 35% of the cases, members participated in less than 10 meetings a year, an additional one third participated in 10-13 meetings a year, while a significant 6% participated even in more than 30 meetings a year, demonstrating a high level of participation in the institutional meetings organized by/with one's cooperative.

Quantifying a level of participation on a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 indicated never, 4 quite frequently and 7 always, it was observed that the average of elected volunteer members participated very frequently to the shareholders' meetings (5.6 points, with 40% of those interviewed stating they always participate and 21% almost always), but also in informal meetings and encounters organized by the heads of their cooperative and in member life in general (points over 5 on the average for both activities with 20% of the members always participating in informal meetings). Participation in informal meetings was slightly lower and particularly the presence in the member booths in the stores. Participation was not significantly different for men and women, nor for people with different levels of education, but was rather correlated to seniority of service within the cooperative. The more the members were active within the cooperative, the higher the level of frequency in their participation not only in shareholders' meetings (an average that increases from 5.2 of the elected members with 5 years of membership to 5.8 with those having over 30 years of seniority), but also and above in informal meetings (increasing from an average of 4 for the first to 5 for the latter). This indicated not only a different willingness of participation on the part of members that worked for years with the cooperative, but also a greater difficulty in favouring in the new members an ongoing active participation. This was partly due to the actual

time available of the different groups of members, differentiating them according to jobs. It was clearly noted that retirees had more time to devote to participating in meetings and shareholders' meetings attending them more frequently than employed members.

It is useful, therefore, to further analyze the non-participation in the shareholder's meetings and motivations regarding participation in these meetings. Of the 60 people that stated they participated rarely or hardly at all in the shareholders' meetings (10% of the total of those interviewed that assigned points between 1 and 3 to participation), the majority stated they do not use proxies since they trust in the decisions that are made by the cooperative's representatives and managers, while the other half stated they often, or sometimes, give a proxy to their representatives. Only 3 of those interviewed stated they are not interested in participating in meetings nor in giving a proxy and do not believe in the power of vote.

**Table 4.11 - Reasons for participating in shareholder's meetings by education level (average)**

	<i>Compulsory education</i>	<i>Professional training</i>	<i>High School diploma</i>	<i>University degree</i>	<i>Total</i>
Member position in the Board of Director	3.65	3.73	3.75	3.88	<b>3.78</b>
Overseeing the financial statement	3.28	3.49	3.34	3.42	<b>3.32</b>
Others members participate	2.95	2.98	2.48	2.62	<b>2.82</b>
Sense of duty	5.10	4.75	5.09	4.90	<b>4.99</b>
Benefits offered by the co-op	1.97	1.89	1.75	1.76	<b>1.91</b>
The member dinner/cocktail	1.56	1.58	1.47	1.58	<b>1.59</b>
Interest in the activity	5.53	5.44	5.69	5.79	<b>5.56</b>
Learning the co-op reality	5.50	5.59	5.76	6.02	<b>5.66</b>
Express its own voice	3.54	3.45	3.22	2.91	<b>3.32</b>

*Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire*

The situation is very positive when observing the few data regarding those that did not participate and the responses of those that almost always participated in meetings. The members participated mainly because they were interested in the topics discussed in the meetings (5.6 average points), since participating in a meeting is a way for observing and learning about the cooperative reality (5.5) and because there is certain sense of duty toward member participation (5 average points). Active member participation was not explained by a willingness to control the management's activities (3.3 of consensus), nor by dynamics based on complying with the participation of the other members (2.8 of consensus), nor for the material benefits received by member participation (consensus of 1.8). Only rarely was member participation an expression of the member's voice, who stated being present in meetings to underline what was wrong with the cooperative. Member participation motivations were not significantly different among different types of members.

The majority of elected member volunteers stated they were very interested in topics raised in the meetings (5.1 average points) even if they often lacked full knowledge of the topics addressed (4.2 points assigned to the knowledge of these topics) and there was no active participation with questions and individual expression of voice (3.7 consensus, therefore below the average of 4) even when the meeting allowed enough time for members to express their voice. Members with a higher level of education were more active with respect to expressing their voice in meetings (average gap of 0.7 points) with people having a lower level of education stating they were not interested in the topics addressed. If the frequency of member participation was an indication of loyalty to the organization and owing to this was proportional to seniority and less influenced by other variables, it was also true that the intensity of member participation was influenced by one's

personal contacts more than by the contacts made through organizational culture. Consequently, it is possible to state that for those groups that participate less frequently in meetings, a positive selection process exists of those with stronger motivations and that two categories of members exist in the meetings: those very loyal to the cooperative and to the meetings, but less active, and those members with a higher level of education that participate when they can since interested in the topics addressed.

**Table 4.12 - Interest in the topics addressed by the meetings by gender (average figures)**

	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
Interest in the topics	5.13	5.12	5.13
Sufficient level of knowledge with the topics	4.08	4.31	4.21
Active participation to the discussion	3.55	3.89	3.74
No interest in most of the discussions	2.11	2.21	2.17
No time or space given to the discussion	1.99	2.39	2.21

*Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaires*

Member participation indicators can also be summarized in the general value of importance perceived by participation. To the question “How important to you is member participation in the meetings?” 50% of elected volunteer members assigned 7 points and an additional 25% believed participating in meetings is very important. The perception of member participation in meetings was not influenced by member employment, seniority of service or level of education that stood to indicate that participation in meetings was the highest level of member participation considered by all those interviewed.

The last useful construct for examining member participation was based on the coherence of values shared between the member and the cooperative. This allowed defining the level of the member identification with the cooperative and with the group where action was carried out. Data revealed a large crossover between Coop values and those of one’s own cooperative as well as those of the member: there was a high level of consensus among the elected volunteer members on the fact that Coop’s value are well adapted and match what they believe is important in life, corresponding to their personal values and the topics they give value to are very similar to Coop’s (average points between 5.2 and 5.4 for all the items considered). With respect to the group, despite some noticeable differences in the abilities and knowledge perceived by the members (average consensus of 4) those interviewed did not absolutely perceive having values that distinguished them from other members (average consensus of 3). Confirming the theoretical hypotheses according to which sharing values increased with the time spent in the organization and with learning values over time (cognitive and ideological learning), members also perceived a greater gap between their values and those held by the other members of the cooperative (despite the average points remained low and equal to 3.4). This data was not influenced by age, or occupational role, but only by seniority as an elected volunteer member and by the member participation as a lending member (for all those items regarding member identification, lenders assigned consensus points higher than the other members).

## **5. Satisfaction and organizational commitment**

Assessing member satisfaction allowed identifying the level of satisfaction generated by cooperative activity, but also any criticalities (positive and negative) of the relationship with the cooperative, to understand on which elements forming the member relations the cooperative can



take action to improve volunteer member perception. Moreover, assessing commitment, as the totality of satisfaction, loyalty and commitment toward the cooperative represented an index of the consequences of a member's feeling of satisfaction regarding the organization's activities and how it was then expressed into active member involvement in a long-term relationship.

With respect to the first profile, satisfaction must be assessed in all of its different facets, namely, all those elements that can be judged in terms of satisfaction. For the aspects addressed, it emerged that members on the average stated they were more than satisfied. The only item that received a response obtaining a lower average regarded the social visibility that volunteering at Coop allowed acquiring across the territory (3.8 average points). Even though the differences between the items were very small, the aspects that most satisfied the members interviewed were relations with other members (5 average points) and with the cooperative employees (4.6), the way in which they were treated (index of fairness in procedures, that received an average numerical value of 4.8 and one's own personal and ideal growth (4.7). The fact that all the average points were lower than 5 indicated a rather low level of satisfaction, particularly referred to the extrinsic elements of the activity carried out (economic benefits received, fairness of benefit distribution, training received), to intrinsic-international elements (participation, relations, communication) and altruistic or solidarity elements. For this purpose, it was noted that satisfaction generated for the local community was attributed an average of 4.3 points, a little above the satisfactory level, as if the contribution made resulted in sufficient feedback in terms of verifiable satisfaction with the recipients of volunteering and the member mainly felt he was fulfilling the cooperative's interests. The satisfaction aspects that presented a higher standard deviation indicated a greater difference in the points assigned and consequently differences in member perceptions that were higher. These mainly regarded relations with the cooperative employees and with the managers, guaranteed social visibility and economic benefits obtained.

**Table 4.13 - Satisfaction for various aspects of one's activity at the cooperative by volunteering seniority (average figures)**

	<5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	20-30 years	>30 years	Total
Participation in cooperative management	4.30	4.32	4.28	4.24	4.53	<b>4.32</b>
Economic benefits offered by the cooperative	4.06	4.35	4.18	4.24	4.61	<b>4.28</b>
Benefit distribution fairness among members	4.37	4.58	4.45	4.36	4.78	<b>4.49</b>
Relations with other members	4.57	5.04	5.05	4.95	5.14	<b>4.99</b>
Relations with cooperative managers	4.18	4.67	4.65	4.26	4.63	<b>4.49</b>
Relations with cooperative employees	4.27	4.73	4.73	4.39	5.04	<b>4.63</b>
Training received as a member	4.14	4.57	4.50	4.45	4.83	<b>4.52</b>
Personal and ideal growth	4.40	4.73	4.58	4.64	5.07	<b>4.68</b>
The way in which a member is treated and heard	4.85	4.98	4.80	4.71	4.95	<b>4.83</b>
Frequency of communication between cooperative and members	4.75	4.73	4.62	4.33	4.47	<b>4.54</b>
Social visibility that being a member allows reaching within the community	3.66	3.75	3.63	3.76	4.26	<b>3.79</b>
The contribution for generating satisfaction for the local community	4.27	4.40	4.19	4.33	4.47	<b>4.31</b>
What the cooperative offers compared to the initial expectations	4.37	4.45	4.41	4.38	4.69	<b>4.45</b>

Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire

The cooperative's capability of satisfying its members in the different aspects was perceived by men and women in the same way, from members having a lower level of education, to the higher levels. It increased gradually with seniority of service at the cooperative and partly with age.

Particularly, members present at Coop for a certain number of years and the elderly felt more significantly satisfied than others (with a gap of over 0,6 points), compared to relations, to training received, personal growth, social visibility reached and economic benefits. The latter item particularly satisfied retirees, housewives and only a few students, considering that their low income tended to have them appreciate any type of economic benefit the cooperative could give them. The absolute category of people that were the least satisfied for all the aspects were the unemployed having a lower sense of involvement and expecting different and better opportunities from the cooperative. Once again, the lending members were more satisfied with the characteristics of their activity than the members that were not.

The other aspect of satisfaction perceived was represented by “commitment”. Above all, it expressed satisfaction in a concise way and the data allowed affirming that overall, Coop’s elected volunteer members were quite satisfied with their position as members, with 4.9 points on a scale from 1 to 7. Another aspect of commitment was the assessment of the intrinsic involvement of the member that allowed verifying that those interviewed were almost always very happy to have become Coop’s volunteer members (5.5 average points). Satisfaction was also recorded for having joined Coop rather than other organizations (consensus equal to 5). The relationship with the cooperative was also demonstrated by a greater commitment for guaranteeing the cooperative activity’s efficiency and continuity (4.8 average points), but also by the unwillingness to betray the cooperative for better outside offers or the unwillingness to tell others about one’s member participation at Coop (aspects on which all those interviewed were in agreement). The sense of commitment in its different components was only slightly higher for members that were active for longer in the cooperative which, in addition to having a greater sense of satisfaction and happiness in their participation, were also somewhat more critical toward the cooperative affirming more frequently that they were not in agreement with the choices made by the organization. Not considered as being an index of disagreement, this represented the fact - verified by many organizations in the previous analyses - that remaining members were more loyal, have a greater sense of participation and thus were more critical.

**Table 4.14 - Level of organizational commitment by age (average figures)**

	<b>&lt; 45</b>	<b>46-60</b>	<b>&gt; 60</b>	<b>Total</b>
Overall satisfaction	4.86	4.73	5.04	<b>4.92</b>
Happiness in being a Coop member	5.38	5.34	5.54	<b>5.46</b>
Commitment with the co-op to guarantee efficiency	4.88	4.78	4.87	<b>4.84</b>
Not to tell others to be a Coop member	1.72	1.52	1.75	<b>1.68</b>
Availability to become a member of any other co-op for a similar position	2.30	1.99	2.00	<b>2.05</b>
Choice of the Coop versus other co-ops	4.63	4.69	5.19	<b>4.95</b>
Disagreement with most of the choices of the co-op	2.18	2.44	2.70	<b>2.53</b>

*Source: our processing of the Volunteer questionnaire*

If the elements analyzed represented static and current indicators of the member perception, those interviewed were also asked to assess the development of satisfaction and commitment over time. Both aspects increased over the years according to the member perceptions. In particular, member participation increased more than satisfaction (4.9 and 4.7 average points, respectively where 4 meant “significantly increased”). Increased satisfaction and participation were not based on having been present in the cooperative for many years. All the members stated their presence in the cooperative over time increased in general their sense of well-being and their willingness to do more, attitudes that increased further for lending members.

These statements were also confirmed with a long-term outlook. Observing the future prospects of elected volunteer members compared to their position within the cooperative, it emerged that over half (53.6%) intended to continue holding the role of member with the current characteristics and an additional 43% wanted to become even more involved, also accepting more demanding tasks. Only 2.4% would reduce their commitment in the cooperative and the remaining 3% believed it will stop volunteering at Coop. Motivations that could urge to leave the cooperative were mainly personal reasons such as family commitments or health reasons, while discussions with other member or the closing of cooperative stores near their homes did not influence the choice of remaining in the cooperative. A certain amount of attention was however focused on Coop's general policies since bad management could cause a high number of members to leave (a motivation with 4.2 points on a scale from 1 to 7).

To conclude the reflection on member satisfaction within the cooperative, it was interesting to observe that those interviewed stated they held great trust in the president of their cooperative (5.6 average points on a scale from 1 to 7) and that even the trust in the main heads of Coop's activities (managers, control bodies and employees) was above average (5.2 average points). It was also true that in some cases the figure of the manager and that of the employees raised some perplexities among those interviewed that were not based on the member's characteristics and level of involvement in the cooperative, but were exclusively connected with the organizational context (with some cooperatives where the level of trust in the manager reached 5.8 points and in some of these, dropped to 4.4).

## **6. Coop's policies: critical points**

The members interviewed were asked to assess which policies could attract new volunteer members and how these tools could be used, particularly computer ones, for facilitating internal communication and modernizing procedures. With respect to the first question, members believed that it is necessary to invest on youth with focused campaigns (64.4% of consensus) and enhance Coop's principles promoting them also externally (42% of consensus) without having to substantially re-elaborate them (only 21.7% of those interviewed felt the need to re-elaborate the principles). The role of the volunteer is balanced in itself and should not be re-elaborated, but providing an added economic benefit could be a positive element (30% of the current elected volunteer members), highlighting what in economics is defined as the "crowding-in" effect: an economic incentive influences the intrinsic motivation as well as the psychological aspect. Another method for attracting new members could be to have a more innovative communication approach (an important aspect for 41.4% of those interviewed) strengthening the idea that it is necessary to look ahead toward technological innovation for acting in this direction.

31.2% of the elected volunteer members believed that using social networks, forums, emails and other computer tool could be a method for attracting new volunteer members and was also considered very useful in advertising the cooperative and themselves (as stated by 56.3% of those interviewed and for improving various aspects of member participation (45.2%). These were not seen as tools to be used only for young people: only 14.7% saw them as ways for establishing contact with Coop exclusively used by youth, while 42% was available to learn these methods if functional to improving the quality of Coop's services. It was also true, however, that 19.6% was not willing to dedicate time to learn these tools and manage them.



The open question regarding which areas of interest the member felt should be developed in his cooperative indicated the focus was on themes inherent to product quality, with a significant awareness of the volunteer members to strengthen the area of biological and zero kilometer products and fair trade. Environmental protection and being attentive to the territory were the areas that members felt Coop should develop, together with enhancing cultural/recreational initiatives. In addition to strengthening the objectives towards which members are typically involved, it was interesting to note how the voice of the volunteer members was raised also on problems regarding cooperative management and the stores: specifically, problems were raised regarding a more attentive enhancement policy of human resources aimed at improving employee treatment; the need for a greater customer care particularly from an economic point of view, pursuing discount policies or addressing the economic difficulties of various groups of customers; the importance of member training and of the territory, also through advanced courses on current events for youth, on health and on consumer culture; the political importance of active involvement, particularly for youth, expanding the network through partnerships above all with small stores and local producers, with the associations and solidarity initiatives across the territory. All suggestions that once again were in line with the high impact of intrinsic motivations of the elected volunteer members.

## CHAPTER V

### COOP'S ELECTED VOLUNTEER MEMBERS: OPINIONS OF THE HEADS OF THE MEMBER POLICY SECTOR<sup>31</sup>

The best way to investigate the opinions and perceptions of volunteers is to test their motivations and behaviors by directly interviewing the players themselves. However, perceptions and behaviors can be strongly influenced by the policies carried out at organizational level. It becomes therefore quite important also completing the research by examining the Coop's point of view on volunteering and on member participation and by investigating in detail the management of volunteers' action. The presence of volunteers is in fact the fruit and result of careful policies that respond to precise objectives adapting them to internal and external changes and to the needs of people.

To understand how the volunteer member perceptions just described are not simply the fruit of self-motivations, but also the response to specific policies and organizational objectives, the empirical analysis is in the present chapter supplemented by a series of interviews with the heads of Coop's member policy sector. The research was conducted in December 2011 interviewing the twelve heads of the cooperative member policies involved in the sector: the nine major cooperatives and the three medium ones, one for each district.<sup>32</sup> Being a qualitative analysis, below are reported some of the most significant excerpts of the conversations had with the member policy heads,<sup>33</sup> so as to compare their perceptions and responses on common themes.

As a methodological note, we want to observe that the survey was conducted on the basis of a set of guidelines of questions drafted by the institute's researchers. The interviews were conducted at a distance using the Skype program, from computer to computer or from computer to telephone, according to the availability of those interviewed. In both cases, this modality allowed an immediate processing of the questions on the computer as well as recording them on an MP3 file for their subsequent examination and data processing. Only one of those interviewed filled out the questions ahead of time. A qualitative survey<sup>34</sup> with these premises allows high levels of analysis of the research's issues and themes with the possibility of understanding the real knowledge of the facts on the part of the person interviewed, of the opinions and perceptions. The person interviewed was not required to limit his point of view based on the modalities proposed by the researcher, which, even though well-structured, may at times not always include elements deemed important or require numerical assessments that are difficult to provide for each issue. The main disadvantages of the qualitative research consist in the fact that the statistical representation of the results is not measurable and is subjective: these elements cause large differences with respect to qualitative methods, both in the public opinion and in scientific circles, but if complementary to other tools previously used can provide different and more complete facets of the theme being addressed.

The expected interview time was one hour. However, since the survey involved questions regarding opinions and perceptions, the actual duration depended largely on the person interviewed, on their availability in providing information as well as on their capability of being

---

<sup>31</sup> Chapter by Beatrice Valline, with the collaboration of Michele Boglioni.

<sup>32</sup> Refer to Chapter I for the analysis of the sampling levels.

<sup>33</sup> Where possible, the statements made by those interviewed are included in quotation marks. In the cases where they are not, concepts were summarized to provide the contribution of all those interviewed without however compromising the quality of the text.

<sup>34</sup> Silverman David, by Gobo Giampietro (2002), *Come fare ricerca qualitativa. Una guida pratica*, Carocci editore, Roma.

concise. Interviews ranged from a minimum of 45 minutes (one case) to a maximum of 2 and a half hours (one case), with an average equal to approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes.

People interviewed (heads of the cooperative's member policy sector) held different roles with respect to the structures of each cooperative: director or executive of member policies, member and consumer director, member organization director, head of communication and member policies, head of institutional activities and recreational time, general secretariat and member executive, vice-president. In every case, all twelve profiles corresponded to people that were heads of the management and organization of the central level of volunteer member activities. Of the 12 people interviewed, 4 were women and 8 men. The average age was equal to 52. There was only one young person interviewed (30 years old), there were three between 40 and 50, six between 50 and 60 and 2 were over 60. Even though the average age was high, the sample was nonetheless heterogeneous and capable of representing innovative ideas for recruiting younger members, but also shared strong values with other members having over twenty years of experience at Coop.

## 1. Current (and past) Coop volunteer members

The heads of the member policy sector were firstly asked to express their perception on the role of volunteer members in the past and today. As they claimed:

*"Participation in Coop's corporate life is a policy aimed at improving the quality of life of a territory [...] it allows being part of a network of relationships with other people [...]. Those people volunteering at Coop in some way participate in this sustainable development model that is often contrary and juxtaposed to that of the market model only based on profit".*

The definitions provided by people interviewed clearly grasp the many different aspects of volunteering: motivations, freedom and non-remunerated activities, the relationship with the cooperative, the fact that volunteering represents an added value for Coop that draws it closer to the logic of a social enterprise or of a socially responsible enterprise in carrying out solidarity activities and sustainable development policies.

Obviously, the debate presented in the chapter on the theoretical background and foundations is proposed again: why do volunteers exist in a consumer cooperative? Which motivations urge a person to become a volunteer member in an enterprise with annual turnovers of millions Euros a year? Perhaps the use of the term "volunteer" as already discussed in the first chapter, is both significant and demanding and perhaps for this reason many cooperatives choose to call them elected members or active members. Or, as one person interviewed commented: "I don't like to use the term volunteer: a pure volunteer accepts the fact of being one if everything around him is coherent". Therefore, it becomes essential that Coop guarantees this coherence between its mission also based on its social, altruistic and solidarity objectives with its volunteer members. For a consumer cooperative as large as Coop, it becomes necessary to respond to its objective of being represented in its territory through the voice and activities of its volunteer members.

In order to reflect on the meaning of volunteering at Coop, once again, the floor was given to the heads of the member policies that were interviewed and the systematic analysis of their responses allowed qualitatively completing the analysis of cooperative motivations in using volunteers, identifying strong and weak points, the role of member participation, the influence of volunteers in the cooperative's decision-making processes and initiatives specifically aimed at enhancing their contribution at Coop.

### 1.1 Why have volunteers at Coop? Strong and weak points

Connection with the territory, promoting social activities, affirming cooperative and solidarity values, ideal vision, focus on the person, consumer-member are the main reasons for which cooperatives rely on the contribution of volunteer members.

The heads of Coop's member policies provided interesting responses, assessed differently with respect to each cooperative's working methods as well as regarding the personal convictions of those interviewed. Behind this diversity there was nonetheless a common denominator: having volunteers at Coop represents a great wealth, not by chance, connected to Coop's nature and values. This was affirmed with great conviction "[...] it is in our DNA, in our history, it is our wealth. Cooperatives have always had, from Rochdale onwards, volunteer member participation in various forms and intensity. I cannot imagine a type of participation only as consumers: if it were limited to only that, we would never have participation as electors or budget approvers or people capable of making changes along the path that as a technical structure we bring ahead. Participation is a way of contact with the territory that no other company has, the territory expresses its needs and its sensibility, reminding us who we are".

In the words of other interviewed people, without volunteers the connection with the territory would be lost; having volunteer members is important "because it is a consumer Coop [...] not simply a supermarket. There is something extra in the shopping cart". Among the medium sized cooperatives, the connection with the territory is particularly felt, not so much to increase visibility, but as a tradition rooted within the small reality of the communities: "I believe the most important thing transmitted by the previous generation is connected with the tradition of the Coop belonging to one's country, to one's own history".

A window on the world and from which Coop can be observed from the outside world:

*"Volunteers allow us to promote ourselves across the territory, promoting our social nature, allowing relationships, acquiring greater visibility and contributing to spreading the principle of the cooperative society".*

Furthermore, the choice of having volunteer members at Coop also depends on its nature of "company of people" of "consumer members organization":

*"If this is a consumer association, it is the consumers that join forces to donate themselves for a common service that protects the community, they must believe in this [...] it is necessary that the interest is also joined by an ideal vision since volunteering expresses this ideal vision, I believe it is important that volunteering exists and is maintained".*

Another interesting last vision focused on the economic nature of a consumer cooperative: having volunteers "represents our strength and our difference compared to others. Working as volunteers within an economic enterprise means not only participating in the enterprise, but also being an added element for its social objectives".

As a conclusion, having volunteers represents Coop's strong point. Nonetheless, having volunteers at Coop also presents some weak points. Table 5.1 includes the statements made by each head of the cooperative member policies. While the strong points converge towards the same reasons for having volunteers<sup>35</sup> (i.e., to succeed in implementing activities founded on Coop values, affirming Coop as a people's enterprise, having Coop's uniqueness across the territory,

---

<sup>35</sup> From a methodological point of view, the two questions were not addressed consecutively, but were separated allowing the person interviewed to provide greater details and allowing the researcher to record any discrepancies.

creating relations with customers), the weak points are crucial in explaining how to improve Coop's member policies. Those interviewed identified at least three criticalities of having volunteer members:

1. the complexity of the exchange between volunteers and the cooperative;
2. the complexity of volunteer coordination on the part of the cooperative;
3. the small representation of volunteers compared to the social structure.

Regarding the complexity of the comparison and exchange, it is obvious that for a cooperative, having to manage the daily relationship with the member sections and their volunteers is an activity that requires commitment and attention in considering all the issues and awareness. Tensions and disagreements can arise since decisions made at the central level do not always match the ideas of those active in the member sections (the closing of two small stores, as reported by one of the people interviewed, was for example, a decision that was not shared by the active members, but deemed necessary by the cooperative).

**Table 5.1 - Strong and weak points of having volunteers at Coop**

<b>Strong points</b>	<b>Weak points</b>
Sharing, being pro-active in implementing Coop values.	They can be conditioning. (I see this as a wealth). One can feel weaker since one must consider all the requests, but this is consistent with what we profess to be.
A large added value from their presence	It is more complicated, compared to other brands of the large scale retail distribution, having a volunteer member with whom one must interact.
It is a people's organization. This is both the value and the difficulty. Quoting its president: "Democracy requires a great effort". The method is contained.	It is a people's organization, this represents the difficulty. "Democracy requires a great effort".
The volunteer adds value and affirms the principle that Coop is above all a people's enterprise.	"Having to say no. There is a danger and a delicate issue when a volunteer member believes he is representing everyone, while every volunteer member must interact and have an exchange with other 2,000 people that have different opinions". Elements of complexity, rather than of weakness.
Only strong points. Having volunteers guarantees being unique across the territory.	
Having volunteers is a strong point by definition. It represents Coop's wealth, even though coordination is complex, but it wouldn't be Coop otherwise "I suggest alternating member Directors over time". It is much easier to manage employees.	Complexity in coordination.
Well- trained member volunteer members. I believe in training people. But Coop must provide high-level training: understanding Coop, its structure, the values of Coop products.	Failing to create a perception of coherence between what we profess to do and what occurs in the territory. We must be more consistent with what we profess to be.
Commercial structure based on members, not on consumers.	Failing to exploit this long list of strong points.
Having them	Not being representative.
Without active volunteer members, many social aspects of the Coop enterprise would be lacking. We would be like other large scale retail distribution companies.	Volunteers represent hundreds of thousands of people. It is difficult to manage such a large organization, getting so many thousands of people together, getting them to agree. We are not sure we can address all the needs and issues raised by the members.
Volunteers are an effective way for interacting with customer members and with the territory.	Our volunteers are not always representative. Formally, they represent the member base very well, but operationally, they have cultural blocks (owing to age, political views, etc.) and have difficulty in addressing Coop issues. They are all volunteers, we must only thank them even if they are not able to do too much or are unable to obtain results. Whatever they do, they are in good faith and they do the best they can. Sometimes the enterprise doesn't provide them with the proper tools.

The complexity regarding coordination was also connected with the complexity of the comparison, with the difficulty found (not always) in using as best as possible the important resource of the multi-dimensional aspect (from the cultural, social, biographical, professional, etc. point of view) represented by volunteering. The tools adopted by the cooperative for coordination, presented in the first chapter, were different also compared to the size and resources of the cooperative: the larger and more structured cooperatives have a larger number of people involved in member policies, often called officials, each one with a specific territorial area of competence, with more member sections to coordinate. In this case, the presence of officials in the member sections is frequent and coordination becomes easier.

The less structured cooperatives, instead, rely on the heads of the member policy sectors that periodically visit the member sections and participate in committee meetings, bringing the cooperative vision and welcoming suggestions. In this case, the direct and ongoing coordination on the territory is partly implemented providing the member sections clear directives on a shared project. The third element of criticality represented by having volunteers at Coop is their scant representation: this is an important fact reported by at least three of the people interviewed (others referred to it in other questions). As mentioned in the first chapter of this research, there are nearly 85,00 elected and non-elected members. Considering only the elected members, i.e. those appointed through elections in the member section committees, there are nearly 5,400 volunteers. With a member structure of over seven million members, or, limiting the data, nearly 115,000 members that participate in separate meetings, it is difficult to imagine that the volunteer members represent the issues and opinions of all the members. If one also adds to limited representation the scarce socio-demographic representation of the territory in most of the cooperatives (confirmed by the high average age as well as a limited political-union context of the volunteers), two integrated pathways were delineated for improvement: on one hand, increasing the visibility of Coop's social projects, informing and promoting Coop's initiatives with a wider and more diverse public with respect to the present active member. On the other, continuing to exploit the great wealth brought by the present volunteer members, also trying to involve them in less traditional activities open to new resources. It is important to note that up to now these activities were not ignored by the cooperatives surveyed: efforts made in this respect were significant, but according to some of the people interviewed, they were ineffective. Campaigns for recruiting new members through the presence of members in the stores, flyers and posters, information regarding activities through different means (from Coop magazine for customers, members or employees) were only some of the tools used. The objective is to make these tools more effective, more credible and direct, since it is not sufficient adding the word "volunteer" to that of "member" in order to improve representation.

### *1.2 What type of relations exist between volunteer members and Coop's mission?*

Volunteers dedicate part of their time to bring forth the mission of the company they belong to. The volunteer member's role is to contribute to implementing the enterprise's mission and values.

"The values underlying Coop's mission are shared not only by the member sections, but also by many cultural associations that operate in our territory": ecological and environmental associations. Even with the Ethical Purchasing Groups: many shared issues – short manufacturing process, etc.

Three are the main reasons explaining the coherence with respect to the mission's values: the overlapping with their ideals, the need of going beyond the commercial objective, and the political motivation, as expressed in these three different statements:

*"Those attracted by the Coop world share some elements, [...] ideas, values, [...]"*.

*"Coop's mission is to sell high quality products at a fair price, promote education, savings, environmental sustainability, mutuality and solidarity. [...] Everything that is part of its mission, beyond the commercial aspect, is enriched by the help of volunteers representing a value".*

*"Volunteer members come from the left wing world: there is a closeness to the political party and to the union", "they carry the mission in their DNA. It represents continuity with what they did 10 years ago".*

Whether these motivations and alignment are only positive or can have negative consequences for example in including new young members will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

### *1.3 Volunteer members influence in Coop's governance*

While the relevance of volunteering has been, up to now, shared among the heads of the member policies, different is the perception of the real power of volunteers and of their influence on the Coop's governance and decision-making process. Four people interviewed believe that this influence exists, since volunteer members express their preferences and "they make us understand which themes are more important for the world they represent". Furthermore, the decision making power of volunteer members is sometimes promoted through specific policies:

*"At Coop, our governance can be greatly influenced since the General Assembly is summoned 4-5 times a year for participating in all the enterprise's decision-making processes: from the budget and final accounts, to the development plan, to the occupational plan, to the opinion regarding who will be the president of the Supervisory Body".*

Nonetheless, some of the heads are more cautious regarding this topic and consider the volunteers' power more as being a stimulus than a reality. For example, it is only improved if the volunteer is part of the Board of Directors of the cooperative, since in such a way:

*"Having a Board of Directors formed by 75% from people across the territory [...] means giving attention to what volunteer members say, to their knowledge of the territorial reality, to problems they can represent. If we did not have Board members coming from the territory, I don't think we would succeed in making such an impact [...]"*.

*"The Board of Directors can elaborate a development plan for the following year. Once it has been decided, it is then discussed and projects can change, unless they are already compatible with the needs".*

A less positive vision also exists that was revealed by three of those interviewed that feel the volunteer member can only make an impact at the operational level, not at the strategic one. In the word of one of the interviewed:

*"It depends: on social issues volunteer members can make a great impact. Not the same on commercial policies. A member meeting will be held by our co-op where an effort will be made to render the relationship between the active member, his representatives and decision-making processes within the cooperative more significant".*

The different stands expressed undoubtedly derived from the history of each cooperative, from the relationship with the member sections and from the actual, or expected, level of volunteer member involvement. Moreover, a difference exists in a volunteer's impact also with respect to the

governance model adopted by the cooperative, whether dual or monistic: in cooperatives with dual systems, or with specific ownership representation bodies, those interviewed underlined a greater impact made by the volunteers in governance. Lastly, it must also be observed how some of those interviewed interpreted the question by referring to the volunteer in the strict sense, to someone who is exclusively present in the member section whose impact in the cooperative's governance is obviously very limited. Others interviewed, instead, considered the Board member as a volunteer if coming from the member section.

#### *1.4 What type of relations exist between volunteers and workers? The presence of conflicts*

The theme of conflict between workers and volunteer members has often been debated in analyzing non-profit organizations where these two categories must often interact. In most cases, this conflict exists, is either latent or visible. The objective, even theoretical, is to find the adequate modality for managing these conflicts having them converge into positive growth elements for the people and the organization. Results obtained by the cooperatives confirm the presence of conflicts, as stated by most of those interviewed (9 out of 12), even though in different ways and for different reasons.

First of all, it is necessary to distinguish between workers present in the stores and those in the cooperative management. As regard to workers:

*"With the employees of the stores, potential conflicts exist since they are not always clear about the role of the volunteer member and therefore have expectations regarding the members as if they were a free work force to be exploited and if this does not occur, they complain. Employees can also feel as if volunteers are in a position of control and can report to their Director [...]"*

*"The relationship with the employees presents various potential conflicts. For example, Coop brand products: members are very knowledgeable regarding these products, employees much less and members don't always accept this. Nonetheless, these conflicts are not worth underlining"*

*"The relationship between volunteer members and employees has always been a very weak point. We come here, we carry out an activity that is necessary for the cooperative, conditions should at least be created to do so (i.e., preparing the material in the stores, etc. [...]). The consolidated perception still exists that members are 'collaborators' [...]. Conflicts must be faced reasonably. We must be careful as an organization to avoid conflicting relationships"*

Wishing to briefly summarize the statements by the heads of the cooperative member policy sectors, probably tension between workers and volunteers derives from the lack of communication, of reciprocal awareness, and of relationships. Frequently, the conflict does not generate from economic elements, but from personal ones. Obviously, the conflict is not equally diffused among co-ops, but there was a positive vision among some of those interviewed. A policy carried out in this direction has been that of the dual governance, where "the members are owners and conduce the social activity, and the employees are responsible of the management of the stores". So, the greatest conflicts, where present, existed between volunteer members and employees in the stores. They were never the reason of serious problems and complaints, even if it should be noted that these are sometimes, but not always, filtered when they reach the cooperative's central management. These conflicts are nearly always based on the difficulty in creating a fluid type of communication between volunteers and employees. They have decreased over time thanks to a clarification of roles: the employee is in charge of managing the stores, the volunteer member is assigned to enhancing Coop's mission. Coop's member policies, therefore, must continue to work in this direction, always greatly focusing on the trends of interpersonal



relations and communication, often the reason for significant demotivation on the part of the volunteer member and of the employee: “at least every three months, the sections have volunteer members meet with the store director since it is important they have relations with the store and not only with the head of the member sections”.

Furthermore, we have to consider that less relevant is the conflict with Coop’s managers and directors:

*“The conflict with those working in the management is not as marked since we are capable of working well with them [...]. It must be managed somehow and it depends on each district head and on the rigidity of the members”.*

Most interestingly, in this case, is observing that the major general conflict stems from Coop’s twofold mission: the commercial and the social one: “This represents the most important conflict. It would be enough to succeed in concealing two needs: have volunteers understand that they are not all the members and the owners of the cooperative; and explain to our commercial friends that if member policies didn’t exist, producing only through marketing and advertising campaigns would be a disaster. Coop’s reputation is also based on those policies they consider useless or annoying”.

This is why a better communication between the two areas can also improve the communication between workers and volunteer members.

### *1.5 How can volunteer members be enhanced and motivated? Cooperative initiatives*

Enhancing the volunteer is based on creating the proper motivational tools. Each cooperative acts differently with respect to its volunteer members, as indicated in Table 5.2: involvement and autonomy are two recurring elements in almost all of the territorial contexts. It is important to have volunteers participate in results obtained in order for them to perceive the importance of their work.

Coop should be more involved in volunteer member training in order to make their role more effective: certain cooperatives admit they attempted training volunteers, but with few results. Others instead stated they began only recently or are working on volunteer member training. The training modalities inevitably depend on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and as confirmed, the elderly volunteers prefer traditional classroom training rather than more innovative participation training (in small groups, etc.). Excluding these latter modalities implies failing to grasp the interests of the younger volunteers. The need emerges to systematically address this issue in order to make training more effective as a motivational element for the volunteer. This also emerged in the analysis of the questionnaires for the elected volunteer members (see Chapter IV).

Volunteer members at Coop do not receive any economic benefits for their activities, with the exception for travel expenses for meetings at the main offices, field trips and a Christmas present: this held true for 11 cooperatives out of 12 and for the elected members (even holding specific positions) as well as for the non-elected members. Only one cooperative decided to adopt a different approach to volunteering: the members that actively and continuously collaborate in Coop initiatives (known as the “super-active members”) receive monthly shopping coupons (for a maximum of 250 Euros). The group that offers its collaboration with less responsibility, but with a steady continuity receives shopping coupons twice a year (a maximum of 100 Euros each one). Everyone receives a 10% discount at Christmas for an established maximum amount. This is a

“correct” type of approach to volunteering as stated by the cooperative itself: compensation is very little so that the activity still falls within volunteering.

**Table 5.2 - Tools for enhancing Coop’s volunteer member**

<i>Tools (in addition to training)</i>	<i>Training</i>	<i>Extrinsic benefits</i>	<i>Innovative tools and incentives</i>
Creating responsibility, decision-making autonomy	Yes, with few results (generally low), need for modernization	No, only expenses reimbursed	No
Publications, reports, taking a stand with management groups	Important incentives during campaigns	Travel, Council meeting	Youth projects: Coop for Music (canceled) Coop for Words (ongoing literary contest)
Social report	Yes, since 2012, instructors already trained	Not from the management. Benefits thanks to activities implemented (discounts for trips, theater, etc.)	Through member sections that promote a new activity since deemed interesting...
Significant member section budget and member management as a support	Yes, training seminars based on economic contents and values	No, only travel expenses for meetings at the main office	No, tradition stills seems to work
initiatives for consumers, assemblies	Yes, every three years regarding the meaning, role and expectations of volunteers. New aspects that could be included: interaction trends and group work	No, only a traditional cake at Christmas and <i>pizza</i> a couple of times a year	No
Listening: Camelot project in the hypermarkets, meetings four times a year between the director, his close collaborators and volunteer members	In progress	Christmas basket, sometimes subscriptions	No, but a great deal of work on people
Great autonomy of the member sections, involvement	Just started: activities in the stores for providing information on Coop brand products, extensive and widespread training for elected members	No, rarely dinners	Social network with positive outcome, Questionnaire for buyers of Coop brand products
	Yes	Pocket expenses reimbursed and participation in recreational-social activities	Not yet!!
Sharing enterprise guidelines, having volunteers participate in both positive and negative results	Yes, with few results	Recreational moments that are very satisfying	Computer training for young people with negative outcome
Listening, expressing appreciation, creating visibility for their work (journals), reporting on activities	Yes, annual program of the member management. Training on group trends, etc, as well as on general topics (i.e., water) and empowerment	Discount coupons for everyone at Christmas, shopping coupons at Christmas and in July for those that have been more active in the member sections, regular shopping coupons for those that are present in a steady and continuous way (super-active member), trip expense reimbursements for travels to the main office	Social network, interesting level of participation from people outside of the enterprise. Flash mob: innovative method for involving people
Active participation in decision-making	Yes, dynamic training plan with computer tools for 20 member sections out of 38	Expenses reimbursed for activities, company dinner	Personal invitation letter to new members to Coop presentation with film viewing: little participation. The member’s participation pathway is still long
Involvement through initiatives	Not much: on Coop brand products, on solidarity and cooperation	Only expenses reimbursed	No

Innovation is a word still abused at Coop: very few cooperatives stated they adopted innovative incentive tools for volunteers. There was also a certain confusion between new activities and incentive tools. Two cooperatives adopted the social network with interesting and positive results in terms of participation: it is obvious how this succeeds in reaching out to a category of young people interested in Coop in a different way. Those interviewed stated that the point is finding ways to make this tool effective for recruiting new volunteer members.

## 2. Coop's future volunteer member

The pages above wished to provide a profile of Coop's elected volunteer member, of his value for Coop, his strong and weak points. Based on this explanation, the two following paragraphs will help understand and develop the views of the heads of Coop's member policy sectors, the future of volunteering.

### 2.1 Coop without volunteer members? Possible alternative organizational scenarios

Cooperatives are rather categorical: Coop without its volunteer members would lose its meaning and contents that have always been part of it historically. It would be like all the other large scale distribution chains. All twelve people interviewed expressed themselves in this way:

*"Coop without volunteers could never be a Coop: no values, no consumer initiatives, no solidarity".*

*"Without volunteers, we would only be commercial operators on the market, nothing else".*

It is difficult to imagine Coop without its volunteers, it would be very sad since it would mean losing direct participation, passion, the contact with the territory, informational exchange with people outside:

*"Members are the players of listening [...] they are people that are very attached to Coop, but are also consumers, they talk to people [...] collecting and channelling information [...] the cooperative needs them since they are an ear that listens to the territory".*

One interview was particularly interesting and amusing. The person interviewed imagined that Coop without volunteers would be an organization halfway between a foundation and tourist resort: "Foundation: a lot of bureaucracy, documents, tenders, the human aspect that is part of solidarity would be lost. [...] Tourist resort: highly organized activities, but cold and mass produced". In addition to the colorful description, the person interviewed proposed measures for change, namely, taking action with today's volunteers to create the volunteers of the future. Another person interviewed agreed with this vision: "I think a pathway should be found to maintain at least a minimum level of presence and active participation of people on our fundamental themes".

Volunteering at Coop has strong reasons for existing, namely historical, territorial and based on interaction, but it must be reformed in its basic structure that has aged, particularly in various contexts. The two following paragraphs will continue to examine this issue.

### 2.2 Coop's ideal profile of the volunteer member

Time, interpersonal skills and sharing Coop's values: these are the principal characteristics that a volunteer at Coop should have. Having available time, however is an element to be considered

with greater flexibility than in the past: it is no longer possible to imagine having only people with a lot of available time and it is necessary to introduce a lighter concept of participation. One of the people interviewed expressed himself: "The ideal type of volunteer does not exist. I imagine a model of a member section where different types of people are present. [...] A person having available time, good interpersonal skills, sharing operative values and principles, willingness to work in a group".

As already mentioned, a volunteer must identify with the social issues in which he is active: environment, solidarity, legality, consumers. In this sense, he/she is:

*"[...] A person with distinctive social skills and interests, who wants to be pro-active, to be an active part of the major issues of our times: environment, solidarity, legality, being a responsible consumer, citizenship, culture, recreational time, etc. and that considers being an active member as a strong point for initiating good practices in the territory he belongs to and on activities connected with these themes. I imagine a member who is no longer connected to the ideology of the previous century, but is connected with the cooperative activities he carries out".*

The knowledge of the Coop world and environmental and solidarity awareness should thus be joined with competence in volunteering. This is built over time within the Coop, but it would be also necessary to find competent people within the organization, both regarding implementing activities and managing member sections:

*"We should speak of a 'multi-profile' since we cannot expect to find the perfect profile on the market". A member that truly has a vision that includes a series of values. A person that cares about the cooperative: working together and giving value to the individual. A profile that has competences. Experience to be projected toward the future. A volunteer that represents a way of thinking and of life that "considers the fact that we enjoy the world on loan and that we must hand it back improved for those that will come after us. [...] The more people are drawn to the cooperative, the better it is". The "ideal profile is work in progress [...]. We must know what the expectations are and together work towards meeting them [...]. We must never consider our work to be finished".*

While the relevance of people looking to the future and not only to the past and the present is therefore needed in the Coop system, the ideal volunteer member must obviously know the Coop brand and the territory, have organizational, communication and planning skills, be not looking for personal benefits. This is why some co-ops claim that:

*"We have difficulty in finding volunteers, particularly finding the right profile [...]".*

So, many different ideas were provided by the heads of the member policy sectors that were interviewed regarding Coop's ideal volunteer member. Nonetheless, in this case, they remained grounded while also ideally aiming high: they recognized that it is impossible to find the perfect profile of the volunteer and often, that doesn't even represent the best solution. A diversity of profiles can increase the wealth of Coop's volunteering.

The following represent the main characteristics that a group of volunteer members belonging to a Coop consumer cooperatives should possess:

- available time;
- planning skills;
- interpersonal, communication and organizational skills;
- sharing Coop values;
- sensibility toward environmental, solidarity, legality and consumer issues;
- knowledge of Coop brand products;
- knowledge of the territory he works in as well as of the Coop system;

- altruistic actions.

Coop can take action on some of these elements, with information and training of the members that are volunteers. With respect to other personal characteristics (sensibility towards certain issues, sharing values, altruism), Coop can take action through more clearly defined membership campaigns for volunteer members that are more focused and effective, capable of attracting people that are truly interested in transmitting and identifying with Coop's social objectives.

### 2.3 The future of volunteering at Coop

When analyzing the future of Coop and of volunteering at Coop, two different positions emerge:

*"Development will be fast-paced. The unification process among cooperatives will occur fast. We will be faced with very large cooperative societies both regarding business volume as well as internal organizational structure and also regarding markets having the absolute need to being adequately represented across the territory. With such a large scale operation, the danger lies in losing what I believe is essential. We must have the strength and coherence to define real relationships with the territory and maintain them. Once again, it is clear that thinking to have this type of relationship assigning it to volunteers that are not aware of their complex role and responsibility can create another type of problem. Even if the member organizations will be extended and ramified across the territory and will be officially recognized [...] this does not necessarily mean there will be an increased awareness of the role played by volunteers; the risk is that management groups will increasingly prevail and dominate. The risk is losing the essential distinctiveness".*

*"Future developments: there will not be any, I don't think coordinated innovation measures are necessary among the various Coops. What each cooperative society must protect is to maintain its own autonomy and to be rooted in the territory according to its specific characteristics. A Coop volunteer of the Coop system does not exist; there exists only a Coop volunteer of each cooperative society".*

The idea that the current volunteering can also work well in the future was expressed with a more moderate vision: "I don't know how it will develop, but I hope that the current characteristics will continue to be maintained, a very close relationship and a great added value, particularly in these times when solidarity, volunteer member participation and reaching common goals are absolutely necessary. Volunteer members represent a great resource, if we wish to use a cooperative term".

There are also two other opposing visions: on one hand the one that delegates the task and the costs for changing to the actual member volunteers, on the other those that instead admit Coop must recruit new resources and then maintain them within the organization, proposing adequate tools and pathways. In both cases, involvement is not easy, particularly within a historical context where some underlined a limited participation and involvement that are required by an adequate organizational structure:

*"I believe in the volunteer's participation, but only in an institution that provides organizational support. [...] Volunteering that is not based on any type of structure has never generated positive results. In the long run, people leave. Another element [...] is represented by coherence, communication regarding projects that are carried out in line with the cooperative value. I believe that we should increasingly tend to transmit Coop volunteering as a territorial need. In the sense that the member section must be recognized as an organized structure, just like any other association [...]. In our case, we are often shy, we avoid creating greater visibility".*

Another person interviewed expressed his opinion on the sense of greater and improved participation, also underlining the need for new volunteers that are better trained, inter-generational, aware and representative: “The need for development, to succeed in taking steps ahead is based on participation: finding new, more effective methods so that members will feel they play a role at Coop, even an ownership role (that does not mean only raising one’s hand for approving the budget). Another important element toward development: succeeding in building the member’s role as players across the territory [...]. If we succeed in recruiting new, well-trained members, more inter-generational and aware, we will be more representative both within the Coop and outside: this requires that the enterprise accepts more representative members [...]”.

Lastly, one of the heads of the member policy sectors provided a comment on the possible contradiction existing with Coop, already mentioned in this chapter’s opening paragraph and which the volunteer member must be aware of and find the proper meaning: “[...] Volunteering in an enterprise that gives beautiful values, but that also has very high turnovers can seem paradoxical, where there are executive salaries (but if we do not give executive salaries to executives, we are not sure that they remain at Coop just because they like it): this is an ambiguity that requires courage in knowing how to deal with it, there are some contradictions that cannot be solved. Coop will never be an enterprise formed only by volunteers, nor by employees. It is an enterprise made of both volunteers and employees”.

The statements made by the heads of the member policy sectors regarding the future of volunteering at Coop are strongly connected with the vision they have of Coop’s ideal volunteer member. Nearly all agree on the fact that development will and must occur toward creating a volunteering that is:

- competent: goodwill is not enough, trained volunteer members, or people willing to be trained, are necessary;
- aware, of the world, of one’s own territory and of Coop: only knowledge leads to effective action and results;
- intergenerational: youth, adults and the elderly can provide contributions that are complementary to each other;
- present: that participates both in member activities and in the “governance” of the cooperative he belongs to;
- representative: of the needs and sensibility of the territory he works in;
- structured: without an organizational structure, the volunteer loses his effectiveness and expresses himself only through individual good actions with few results.

### 3. Conclusive reflections

Thanks to the availability and the expertise on the theme of the persons interviewed, this chapter allowed adding to the research a precious qualitative and perceptive component. The floor was given to the heads of the member policy sectors of the twelve cooperatives involved in the survey and was returned by them: they represent the affirmations, to them the results processed are returned and the identification of the possible strategies for improvement. Each cooperative has its own history and autonomously manages the member policies for the territory of competence with results that are often similar, but that can also be very different from each other. This emerged in the interviews and it is worth reiterating this concept in the conclusions. Owing to the different points of departure, not always will the suggestions below be applied uniformly to all

Coops, but in any case these are objectives shared by all the cooperatives which they should aim at and in some cases, are already aiming at.

In general, the research revealed the great strength of Coop's volunteers. All those interviewed consider volunteer members as a precious resource essential for Coop's meaning and uniqueness, first of all, based on its close connection with the territory's needs. All the heads of the member policy sectors presented a common element: they did not want, or did not dare, to speak of Coop volunteers. They spoke only of elected members, of active members in their sections. They spoke of participation, often associating it with that of the members in the meetings, often to that of members in their respective sections. The 2010 ANCC-Coop Report mentioned only twice the term "volunteer work", but not even once "volunteering", referred to those involved in member activities. At the same time, in the cooperative Articles of Association and in the Regulations, the reference to volunteering was not taken for granted and if present, was actually downplayed. Nonetheless, Coop can fully speak of volunteer members. This is an important clarification of the term that could lead to important changes in Coop's image, communicating to the outside world what Coop does in its "sections" (perhaps a rather old-fashioned word for drawing new resources?) and what can be implemented at Coop.

In order for volunteers to feel valued within the organization, those interviewed believe it is necessary that Coop provides them in advance with the tools for carrying out their activities autonomously and after, allows them to participate in the results obtained. Within this vision, the principal tools on which Coop can take action are information, training, small extrinsic benefits (shopping coupons, field trips, etc.) and reporting on activities carried out. The weak point to focus on particularly is volunteer training: it is not a widespread tool even though it seems to be increasing. Currently, it is ineffective, fragmented and old-fashioned. Modernizing and innovating training, distinguishing between the initial one (for new volunteers) and a continuous one (for those already present) could be an important objective that Coop could set for itself, both for attracting young people, as well as increasing the competence of those that have been at Coop for some time.

The wealth of Coop volunteering can and must derive from the diversity of the people interested in Coop. Not only retirees or young people. Not only militants in advocacy associations, but also members of young families. A group of volunteers that has available time, but that is targeted towards possibilities, that identifies with Coop values and with the sensibility towards Coop's values and themes. A group that includes people coming from all social levels and professions, having different skills and competence, knowledge and capabilities, including planning, interpersonal, communication and organizational skills.

Without downplaying what has been done up to now and those that have been instrumental in implementing activities, that have given, and continue to give added value to Coop's mission, all of the heads of Coop's member policy sectors unanimously agree: Coop needs to be in step with the changing times. It must innovate its structures for current volunteers, create competent volunteers, aware of the world, of their own territory and of Coop. An intergenerational group that also participates in the enterprise's "governance", representing all the members and well-structured.

## CONCLUSIONS

When as citizens or researchers we think of Coop, owing to its widespread presence over the national territory, we imagine the large numbers of consumer cooperative in terms of production value and revenues, members and employees, cooperatives and stores. For most of those interviewed, Coop is connected with the National Association of Consumer Cooperatives; perhaps some may describe its principles and objectives seen as a territorial organization, the store focusing on consumer protection. But the first thing that most likely leaves everyone surprised is the significant presence of volunteer members at Coop. Why is a consumer cooperative structured in a way that not only involves its membership, but also consumer members and volunteer members? Which are the specific characteristics of this figure and what does it mean to these people to also be volunteers at Coop? What does their “voluntary donation” consist of and what is the meaning of the different types of member participation in the cooperative?

The research conducted on member participation of elected volunteer members is certainly interesting for understanding the roots and development of a social phenomenon and of a social capital element of the territory, for externalizing the knowledge of a factor that undoubtedly represents an added value for Coop, for underlining the importance of over 8,000 people involved in this organization’s solidarity, social and environmental activities, in protecting not only consumers, but all citizens in general. Consulting with elected volunteer members for learning their perceptions and motivations is also and above all a method for the cooperative for understanding how they not only represent a current resources, but also a resource they can count on in the future. The research presented in this report had the objective and also perhaps the merit, based on the results reached, of providing reflections under various different profiles – and among different people – regarding the importance of Coop’s volunteer member in spreading altruistic values and motivations in managing member policies. This research was based on the 2011 Year of Volunteering and brings its results to the 2012 Year of Cooperatives: this represents a particularly symbolic passage leading to reflecting on how Coop’s elected volunteer member represents a link between these two realities and in particular, within a consumer cooperative, is the referent for developing and promoting the seventh cooperative principle, that of a broadened interest towards the community. If as part of its values and its mission, in addition to the commercial and mutual nature, Coop also recognizes its social and solidarity aspects, these two elements are not at all contrasting within the organization, but strengthened by the presence of elected volunteer members. Calling them “volunteers” (despite some perplexity on the part of the heads of the member policies) is a way for strengthening the value of non-remunerated human resources which represent comparative advantages for Coop that other associations are lacking. It is the word that identifies the means through which the social and solidarity values are brought to the organization. It identifies a precise category of people bringing interests to the cooperative, those closest to the community, not interested in economic incentives.

The description of the phenomenon becomes even more significant when considering this word. Thanks to its 8,500 volunteers, the cooperatives have the possibility of firmly implementing activities founded on Coop’s values, transmitting values to the outside world, confirming Coop as an enterprise based on people, having Coop’s uniqueness and value emerge across the territory and bringing altruistic and intrinsic motivations within the cooperative. This is thanks to attentive involvement and non-economical incentive policies. These statements are not only confirmed in the ideological approach to policies on the part of the heads of Coop’s member policy sector, but



can also be found in the perceptions of the elected volunteer members that were interviewed: a high sense of belonging and of self-perception within the cooperative; a strong alignment of values and ideology between volunteer members, cooperative and other members; a stated psychological sense of belonging to the organization and mainly altruistic, ideological and intrinsic motivations for participation and for staying. Those interviewed were very clear: we are not volunteer members for drawing personal benefits, but because we believe in Coop's mission and values and we are committed to improving the internal atmosphere and reaching the enterprise's objectives.

If the analysis of data collected highlights the strong connection with the cooperative, the satisfaction and commitment of the elected volunteer members, the ongoing participation and loyalty to the cooperative as indicated by the outstanding positive results for the policies undertaken, one must not, however ignore various criticalities that also emerged.

A general element of the criticality of managing relations with Coop volunteers was their difficulty in being representative in absolute terms at the time of meetings: the volunteer members that on the average participated in meetings were 5,400 out of 115,000 members. This obviously does not lead to difficulties, decision-making costs or sub-representation, but leads to reflecting on how Coop's policies need to be channelled into at least two directions: one for increasing Coop's social project visibility, promoting Coop's initiatives and making them attractive for a broader and different public with respect to the current active member and that of continuing to exploit the great value and wealth brought by the current volunteers, also trying to involve them in less traditional activities, more open to new resources, even guaranteeing more influence in governance.

By examining policies toward volunteer members in the strict sense based on selection and aggregation processes, it emerged that a high percentage of elected volunteer members were older and retired. Even though this matched a loyalty to the cooperative over the years, it was also often an index of a low presence of young people and of a closed-minded approach of the historical group of volunteer members towards new recruits and new ideas. Owing to this fact, the cooperative raised questions regarding how its social function can continue to be carried out in the future if new volunteer members are not recruited. It also leads to reflecting on how the member policies undertaken can risk not sufficiently representing different opinions and voice within the territory. For this purpose, the cooperative should consider communication policies with the territory capable of attracting young people and incentive and recognition policies that can increase their desire to participate; this was confirmed by the high data that are not lower than those of the elder members. The presence of young volunteer members is not only a need for continuing activities, but also for a source of internal exchange among many different categories of people, for spreading different knowledge and innovation for the cooperative.

Secondly, the relationship between volunteers and cooperatives is very complex in the various comparisons and in coordination and must be well managed. These are two weak points that often emerged during the interviews with the heads of the member policy sectors, but that nonetheless can be overcome by the cooperatives on one hand by using tools and expertise available for resolving conflicts even in relations with workers and on the other, by following transparent communication procedures and modalities that are perceived as being fairer, as indicated in the interviews with the volunteer members.

Thirdly, as researchers, we wish to reflect on a particular reference to economic literature: if the intrinsic motivation, intended as an interest for member participation and willingness to carry it out owing to its social and ideological value, obviously increases participation, the collaborative behavior and results for the enterprise become more difficult to manage and more risky.

Ideological exaggerations often lead to the predominance of groups and leaderships that distort the preferences of others and when this type of behavior must be changed, action taken by the management can lead to conflict, to total demotivation and cause the outflow of those that are more strongly motivated. At Coop, this risk could emerge where the volunteer member is not sufficiently connected with different groups and people and therefore his ideas are not only prevalent, but also imposed with others. For this purpose, it is necessary that the cooperatives keep the exaggerated intrinsic motivations and values of the volunteer members under control in order to guarantee that they are aligned to those of the cooperatives and interact with those of other groups of people, strengthening them and not dominating them.

In light of these brief conclusions, it is difficult to provide Coop with general suggestions for improving its management of volunteer members and member policies. The results reached are very good and indicate that volunteer members have a full understanding of their role and their mission, in addition to their organization. If looking at the present means being satisfied with the policies undertaken, looking ahead to the future means new challenges to be faced starting from the policies to be implemented for attracting new volunteers and those for creating participation incentives, without however underestimating the different visibility that the volunteer member can give Coop across the territory. Since volunteers are the ongoing energy of Coop's social trends and as stated by those interviewed, the relationship between Coop and its volunteer members is a relationship "in harmony" and an operational supplement since members to Coop are like hands to arms or feet to legs; it is an exchange of values in a relationship that is also educational "a mother-son relationship where the good mother should listen to her children" where "maternal ambitions exist and one takes care of various aspects of a person's life". It is "a mutual contamination" or a sort of "communicating vessels" "where the cooperative helps a person in donating oneself, but also receives a great deal back".