Cooperatives of Mexico: Their Social Benefits and Their Contribution to Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals

Denise Díaz de León 1, Omar Díaz Fragoso 2, Igor Rivera 1,* and Gibrán Rivera 1

Abstract: Cooperatives are considered an organizational alternative based on principles and values. These organizations seek the fulfillment of social and economic benefits for their members as well as for the community in which they develop. Their nature allows them to solve problems such as social and labor exclusion as well as environmental issues. However, although their benefits to society have been extensively studied, little is known about how these organizations contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim of this study is to analyze the way in which the social benefits generated by cooperatives contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs in Mexico City. This qualitative study uses interviews and thematic analysis to identify and define the different social benefits generated by 134 cooperatives in Mexico City. These benefits were analyzed to identify whether they contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs. The results stimulate the theoretical and empirical discussion about the role of cooperatives and their contribution to solving current social problems, as established by the United Nations. The article presented is of scientific interest and it is also relevant for the elaboration of public policies aimed at producing better results for these types of organizations.

Keywords: cooperatives; social economy; sustainable development goals

1. Introduction

Nowadays, an important group of consumers is changing their buying patterns, seeking a more responsible consumption. This has motivated organizations to act transparently with social responsibility, seeking to generate benefits for the communities where they operate (Bassi and Vincenti 2015). In this sense, cooperatives attempt to meet the new needs of consumers through services and products that not only satisfy their consumption demands but also improve aspects such as health, social development, fair trade and care for the environment. Cooperatives can also contribute to a sustainable economy and social and environmental development. In the context of economic crisis, cooperatives are expected to manage social responsibility problems as a competitive priority (Amonarriz et al. 2017) and commit themselves to meet a triple balance between their economic, social, and environmental objectives (ILO 2018). This is viable because cooperatives are expected to be consistent with the principles and values established by the International Association of Cooperatives (AIC). These objectives make cooperative organizations capable of solving problems of inclusion, poverty, and health, among other problems that current societies face (Amonarriz et al. 2017; Bassí and Vincenti 2015; ILO 2018). In addition, their contributions to solving social concerns have placed them as organizations with the capacity to contribute to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For this reason, some public policies have been designed in Mexico in order to promote cooperative organizations as a viable
option for self-employment for the inhabitants of Mexico City, through the Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion of the CDMX (STyFE) (García 2018).

STyFE designed and implemented government actions since 2010 to promote the creation of cooperatives in Mexico City, in accordance with the ninth article of the Cooperative Development Law of Mexico City. One of the first actions was the creation of the program “Que buena puntada”. This program aimed at supporting textile cooperatives by purchasing school uniforms produced by them, through a government school uniform program. This program was replaced in 2012 by the Program for the Promotion, Strengthening and Integration of Cooperatives, which provided cooperatives with financial resources for the acquisition of machinery and equipment that would strengthen their productive processes. Subsequently, in 2015, the cooperatives demanded STyFE to include an education program into the initiative (aligned to the fifth principle of cooperatives). In view of this, the STyFE took on the task of designing, promoting and implementing the Program for the Development of Cooperatives in Mexico City, (Cooperatives CDMX). This program included training on cooperative education, professionalization of their productive and commercial processes, and guidance provided on the acquisition of machinery and equipment according to their productive activity. Derived from the Cooperatives CDMX program, 600 cooperatives with different economic activities have been created in four years, generating benefits in their financial, productive and social areas of the organizations. As mentioned before, these organizations have the capacity to solve the economic and social problems of local communities, as well as the ability to contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs. Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze the way in which the social benefits generated by cooperatives contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs in Mexico City. To conduct the study, 134 questionnaires were applied to cooperatives that participated in the 2016 CDMX Cooperatives program. The benefits identified were grouped into 10 categories that show the variety of benefits generated in their communities and within their own organizations, as perceived by these organizations. The benefits were subsequently analyzed to identify whether they contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs.

The literature that was reviewed to accomplish the goal of this work relates, initially, to an understanding of cooperative organizations, as a medium that drives the communities where they are established. Secondly, the literature sought to establish if this endeavor is congruent with the fulfillment of the SDGs. Finally, there is an attempt to capture how the activities in which cooperatives engage impact upon the goals of the SDGs.

The few scientific contributions that relate the activities of cooperatives and the SDGs obscure our understanding of how the benefits generated by these organizations are brought to society. It is precisely in this sense that the current article seeks to contribute to an understanding of the contribution of cooperatives in their communities and how this can affect the fulfillment of the SDGs. Furthermore, focusing our work on an urban space such as Mexico City makes it a unique contribution, since to our knowledge, there is no previous work in the literature that deals with these concerns within a similar context.

Another contribution has to do with the practical implications that emerge from this research; local and federal governments could rely on the analyzes provided in this article to design governmental programs to benefit cooperative organizations, that in turn could contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs. Organizations such as the UN or the ILO could be strategic allies of governments when promoting this type of initiative.

In this article, the main features of cooperatives are presented as well as the benefits that, according to the scientific literature, this type of organization provides to society. Likewise, the SDGs proposed by the United Nations (UN) and their relationship with the cooperative principles and values are exposed. Then, the methodology used to collect and analyze the testimonies of the participants is described. Subsequently, the interpretation of the data is shown, the content of which shows the benefits that cooperatives in Mexico City provide to the society. Later, the way in which these benefits contribute to the fulfillment of some Sustainable Development Goals is discussed. Finally, the conclusions derived from
the study are presented, as well as some possible areas of research that would allow to extend this study.

This study is relevant because it allows us to know, from the point of view of the cooperatives, the benefits that these organizations provide to the society. In this sense, the CDMX Cooperatives program aided the collection of a significant number of testimonies that were subsequently analyzed, discussed and synthesized in 10 topics. Similarly, this is a novel investigation as it incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) into the analysis; particularly, the way in which cooperatives contribute to its fulfillment. In general, the interpretation of the data allowed us to establish 10 areas in which cooperatives contribute socially, as well as six Sustainable Development Goals in which these organizations participate directly.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section analyzes how cooperatives can be efficient in solving problems such as decent work, gender equality, sustainable development, among others, in contexts other than Mexico City. Many studies have found how these organizations can benefit the communities in which they operate, and how, from different perspectives, their contribution shows consistency with the compliance with the SDGs.

Cooperatives in Mexico are democratically managed social enterprises. They are constituted at least by five individuals who share the pursuit of social and economic objectives. The social side allows them to generate benefits to the community where they operate and to their members by adhering to the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, aligned with the principles of autonomy, independence, cooperation, education and feeling towards the community (ICA 2018). These social benefits are, for example, better employment conditions, development of the social and solidarity economy, social development, education, preservation of the environment, collaboration with other organizations, preservation of culture and traditions and the empowerment of partners. In addition, these organizations tend to develop business models oriented towards social, labor and economic inclusion (Matos et al. 2019). However, as mentioned by Thomet and Vozza (2010), the main challenges for these organizations are to find a balance between the needs of their partners and the economic conditions in which they develop. It is important to clarify, for example, that this challenge could lead to less efficient decision-making due to the democratic management cooperatives promote, which in turn could threaten the sustainability, development and growth of cooperatives.

Despite the challenges that cooperatives face, cooperatives generate benefits to their partners (Alfonso et al. 2016; Bandeira et al. 2017; Charterina 2015; Monge 2010; Muciño 2013; Rakopoulos 2015; Redondo et al. 2011; Siapera and Papadopoulou 2016; Vieta 2013) and to their communities, as well as to groups of people in vulnerable situations. Examples of this can be found in the support provided by cooperatives to people in street situations (Magni and Günther 2014) and the unemployed. Similarly, cooperatives support schools, homes, and welfare centers; they care as well about the environment, demonstrating not only their economic commitment, but also their social contribution (Alfonso et al. 2016; Charterina 2015; Picciotti 2017). In fact, the evidence shows how these organizations contribute to society in terms of the reduction of poverty, the generation of decent jobs for society and the contribution to economic growth, equity and social integration (Amonarriz et al. 2017; Divar Garteiz-Aurrecoa 2013; Galindo-Reyes et al. 2016; Monge 2010; Muciño 2013). An opposite story is observed in privately owned companies, where there is an interest for maximizing investments, without necessarily generating social and environmental benefits for the communities in which cooperatives are developed (Gómez and Hernández 2020; W. A. Sahlman 1996).

The employment alternatives generated by cooperatives are innovative and viable in times of crisis (Canalda Criado 2019; González and Palma 2019; Redondo et al. 2011; Vieta 2013; Wu et al. 2018). These alternatives are not solely focused on vulnerable people. There is evidence in previous literature that shows how these alternatives promote a balance
between a decent job and a better quality of life for the members of the cooperative and their communities (Alfonso et al. 2016; Magni and Günther 2014; Pacheco Almaraz et al. 2019; Vieta 2013; Wu et al. 2018). The quality of life of cooperative members is reflected in the benefits they receive, such as savings for retirement and health services (Magni and Günther 2014; Mori 2014; Rakopoulos 2015; Vieta 2013). Moreover, in accordance with the principles of cooperative organizations, members have the benefit of developing and acquiring new knowledge and skills according to their interests and for the benefit of the organization (Pacheco Almaraz et al. 2019; Vieta 2013).

Cooperatives have a special interest in the development of skills and abilities of their partners and workers. Through workshops and training courses, partners and workers acquire new skills and abilities that they might not know they could have (Canalda Criado 2019; Magni and Günther 2014; Monge 2010; Pacheco Almaraz et al. 2019; Piekielek 2010; Vieta 2013). The principle of education followed by cooperatives encourages their partners to share the cooperative culture with the community (Alfonso et al. 2016; Monge 2010). In this sense, they also promote the development of skills and abilities of the general public, especially in vulnerable groups (Wu et al. 2018). Despite the evidence that shows the benefits derived from the development of skills that cooperativists have, authors such as Rodríguez (2013) argue that there is a lack of systemic education in the ethical, philosophical and technical training of managers, employees and communities.

Additionally, cooperatives promote horizontal structures that allow for the democratization of decision-making; consequently, the dialogue between partners is flexible and open (Bretos and Marcuello 2017; Piekielek 2010; Redondo et al. 2011; Siapera and Papadopoulou 2016; Vieta 2013). This in turn leads to the existence of comfortable and safe places to develop the core activity of the cooperative. In addition, the establishment of friendly relations is encouraged, seeking the development of skills and generating active learning within the organization (Galindo-Reyes et al. 2016; Vieta 2013). Although this could be a benefit for the members of the cooperative, Fazzini and Russo (2014) point out that this horizontality could have negative consequences, such as an inefficient decision-making process, which is often reflected in the financial performance of organizations. On the other hand, cooperative societies are characterized by a greater equity in the distribution of revenues (Piekielek 2010; Siapera and Papadopoulou 2016; Vieta 2013). Finally, cooperatives have an impact on informal workers, contributing to the transitioning towards a formalization of self-employment that entails a better recognition of their jobs (Magni and Günther 2014).

Unlike the traditional notion of entrepreneurship, cooperativism allows for the construction of an alternative identity as a worker (Vuotto 2016). In this identity, individuals are integrated into a collective framework that aims at working for a common good through the development of an economic activity (Ferguson 2018). There is also evidence that shows how the cooperative model has served women, as a whole, to associate and manage their own economic activities (Ferguson 2018; Galindo-Reyes et al. 2016). This has contributed to the improvement of the social, economic and cultural situation of women (Charterina 2015). In this sense, Blanco and Domínguez (2019) mention that the cooperative approach model has implications for the empowerment of women and gender equality, thus contributing to the fulfillment of SDG 5 (gender equality) and 10 (reduction of inequalities). However, the contextual conditions and the small size of these organizations could not contribute to this sort of endeavor, so more support and financial help at the beginning of the project could be ideal.

Another aspect to highlight, especially within indigenous communities, is the identity that cooperatives give to their members, empowering these communities (Ferguson 2018; Galindo-Reyes et al. 2016; Piekielek 2010). According to the literature, cooperatives are societies that fight for the recovery and preservation of ancestral practices, as well as for the ethnic identity of their communities (Ferguson 2018; Piekielek 2010). In effect, cooperatives carry out activities to promote cultural and ancestral traditions that have favored their role in society in recent times (Piekielek 2010; Prieto and Guzmán 2019).
As suggested earlier, cooperative societies are organizations that not only deal with the interests of their members and those of the members of their communities, but they are also entities that care about the environment that surrounds the community (Conde and Rodríguez 2020; Alfonso et al. 2016; Charterina 2015; Pacheco Almaraz et al. 2019). The above can be verified through the generation and application of techniques that are friendly to the environment (Piekielek 2010). An example of this shows how some cooperatives carry out recycling practices of the waste generated by their production processes (Vieta 2013). Another aspect has to do with the fact that the principles that guide cooperatives promote relationships with the environment in which they are developed (Monge 2010). However, according to N. Rodríguez et al. (2018) there is still much to do in educating associates and the community on issues of sustainability, consumption and production, as well as promoting small-scaled consumption circuits and friendly spaces with the environment.

These organizations not only look after the interests of their members, but also those of the territory in which they are located (Alfonso et al. 2016). They work in synergy with other actors, such as consumers, the unemployed, suppliers, and customers, among others, for the fulfillment of common objectives (Alfonso et al. 2016; de Miranda 2014). In fact, the solidarity of these organizations can be seen in the bonds they promote with local consumers for the benefit of the community (Ferguson 2018; Magni and Günther 2014; Piekielek 2010), thereby contributing to local and economic development (Alfonso et al. 2016). On the other hand, for the development and growth of the cooperative movement, networks are encouraged to be developed among cooperatives at the regional, national and international level (Alfonso et al. 2016). In this sense, they also relate to other actors that promote their growth, such as universities, governments, and research centers, among others (Vieta 2013). While it is true that the principle of inter-cooperation promotes the development of collaboration networks between cooperatives and other actors of their ecosystem, there remains a need to take into account that these organizations pursue social, economic and environmental goals, so these relationships should, in the best case, contribute to the fulfillment of these three objectives.

Cooperative organizations allow for the emergence of a solidarity economy (Vieta 2013). In fact, these societies are considered as development entities because they favor economic empowerment in the locality where they are established (Amonarriz et al. 2017). In addition, these organizations promote a solidarity economy because the partners and the community are in charge of managing their own activities (Ferguson 2018). Finally, cooperatives encourage practices associated with fair trade, offering products at fair prices and services that provide benefits to society (Divar Garteiz-Aurrecoa 2013; Piekielek 2010).

All these benefits derived from the functioning of cooperatives can be evaluated under the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulated by the United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are global actions that came into force on January 1, 2016. Their intention is to improve the lives of people, the planet and the environment. There are 17 objectives aimed at promoting sustainable development in the economic, social and environmental spheres (UN 2015). They were designed with the intention that nations adopt measures to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for people (ILO and ICA 2015).

The SDGs resonate with many of the practices of cooperatives, which is why this article considers the interrelationship between the two. In fact, what we argue is that cooperatives are assumed to be organizations capable of promoting and contributing to the fulfillment of the SDGs. This is possible because their nature, principles and values are based on the people, on the integration and well-being of its members and their communities (Conde and Rodríguez 2020; COPAC 2015). However, cooperatives require both to boost the creation of public policies that revalue their relevance in the social, economic and environmental development, how their existence is aligned to the SDGs (Gómez and Hernández 2020), and to build national and international alliances (N. Rodríguez et al. 2018).
Some studies show that cooperatives contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs (Conde and Rodríguez 2020; Gas-ib-Carbonel 2019; ILO and ICA 2015). Based on these studies, Table 1, below, highlights the actions of cooperatives to achieve these goals.

**Table 1. Cooperatives and their contribution to the SDGs.**

| SDG  | Description                                                                 | Examples of How Cooperatives Contribute to the Achievement of SDGs                                                                 |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Goal 1: No poverty | Ensure that the most vulnerable people have the right to access to economic resources and basic services. | Cooperatives create economic opportunities, empower disadvantaged people, provide security for the poor, and generate assets for its members. |
| Goal 2: Zero hunger | Provide access to nutritious food for people in vulnerable situations, as well as to ensure the sustainability of agricultural production systems. | Agroecological cooperatives are capable of generating food and distributing it in times of economic or social crisis, contributing to the preservation of sustainable agribusiness systems. |
| Goal 3: Good health and well-being | Guarantee universal access to health services. | These organizations guarantee the provision of health services, in addition to raising public awareness of disease prevention. |
| Goal 4: Quality education | Provide young people and adults the knowledge and skills needed to access decent jobs and promoting entrepreneurship. Ensure education among vulnerable people. | These organizations promote professional education related to cooperativism, social economy and environmental sustainability for their members and for the people of the community in which they develop. |
| Goal 5: Gender equality | Eliminate practices of discrimination against women. Procure for women the right to economic resources, as well as their leadership in the social and economic spheres. | Cooperatives constituted by women promote economic autonomy, ensuring a fair wage for their homes. |
| Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation | Improve water quality and achieve universal access for all. | Agricultural cooperatives work under ethical and sustainable principles. They implement water care practices, as well as clean and renewable energies that are inexpensive and universally accessible. |
| Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy | Guarantee access to energy services. Increase knowledge and investment in renewable energy. | Cooperatives are employers of people who are in a vulnerable state. These people would hardly find a job in private companies, because they are elderly, women, or people with disabilities. This favors their inclusion in the formal labor market with full rights. |
| Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth | Generate respectable and productive employment with decent remuneration for vulnerable sectors. Reduce the proportion of unemployed youth. Protect labor rights. | Cooperatives offer sustainable and accessible alternatives in communities where there is no private interest in developing infrastructure such as roads, schools, and hospitals. |
| Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure | Provide the necessary infrastructure for economic and social activities. | The principles of inclusion, democracy and participation promote the fight against social inequalities, which permeates other spheres of incidence. |
| Goal 10: Reduced inequalities | Ensure economic and social inclusion, as well as equal opportunities for everyone. | Cooperatives are inserted in large cities, modifying the city environment in favor of green, inclusive, accessible and ecological spaces. |
| Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities | Ensure housing and basic services for all, as well as safe and sustainable transport systems. Reduce the negative environmental impact. | The principles and values of cooperatives encourage reflection and change in production and consumption habits, both inside and outside the organization. |
| Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production | Sustainable management of natural resources, reduction of food waste, as well as promotion of sustainable agricultural production practices. | |
Table 1. Cont.

| SDG                                      | Description                                                                 | Examples of How Cooperatives Contribute to the Achievement of SDGs                                      |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Goal 13: Climate action**              | Strengthening of environmental care measures, as well as education and awareness among communities. | Cooperatives involve people in the search for solutions and alternatives for managing the natural resources of their community. In addition, they promote friendly environmental laws and production processes. |
| **Goal 14: Life below water**            | Reduce sea pollution and protect marine and coastal ecosystems.              |                                                                                                     |
| **Goal 15: Life on land**                | Promote the sustainable management of terrestrial ecosystems. End deforestation and ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems. |                                                                                                     |
| **Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions** | Significantly reduce violence, exploitation and human trafficking, as well as corruption and organized crime. | Cooperatives help rebuild economies after war conflicts, through solidarity efforts deployed via emotional, moral and political support. |
| **Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals**  | Promotion of public, private and civil society alliances.                   | Compliance with the SDGs is not possible without international cooperation. Cooperatives promote solidarity and networking with the aim of creating synergies for a greater impact on their projects. |

Source: Evidence from data informed by ILO and ICA (2015) and UN (2015).

Although there are only a few studies that show how cooperatives contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs, recent studies have shown how cooperatives contribute to goals 8, 11, 13, 16 and 17, as mentioned in the previous table (Bhowmik 2021; A. V. Garcia et al. 2020; Gutberlet 2021; Fernandez-Guadaño et al. 2020; Martinez-Leon et al. 2020; Mastronardi and Romagnoli 2020; Mamontov et al. 2021; Moon and Lee 2020; Tomashevskaya et al. 2021). This literature places cooperativism and its principle of associativity as its central concern, showing how these factors encourage social responsibility in these organizations, a theme that relates to one or two SDGs.

3. Materials and Methods

A total of 134 cooperative organizations from Mexico City which were part of the CDMX Cooperatives Program of 2016 participated in the study. These organizations are distributed in the 16 municipalities of the city; however, 46 percent of these are located in the Tlalpan and Xochimilco municipalities. The cooperatives had been legally constituted and operating for more than a year, so they had ties with the members of their community. The foregoing allowed them to be considered as reliable sources of information. For its part, data collection was carried out in work sessions of the program. These sessions were attended by at least one member of each cooperative, who was/were asked to describe how their organization contributes to the social and economic development of Mexico City, especially to the community in which they are situated. In this sense, an open question was chosen to allow the respondents to provide their testimony in a flexible way and without imposing prior ideas. Consequently, the collected dataset exhibits diversity of perspectives on the contributions of cooperative organizations in the city.

The examination of the data was carried out based on the thematic analysis method. This method is used to “identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within the data” (V. Braun and Clarke 2006). In addition, it is characterized by not being committed to any theoretical or epistemological position, so it can be applied flexibly. Furthermore, it is a method that can be used from a realistic or constructivist perspective, as well as with an inductive or deductive logic during the analysis of the data (Braun and Clarke 2012). Therefore, thematic analysis is a useful method to study several phenomena. Although this has been mainly used to study health-related issues (Bohren et al. 2017; Rice et al. 2018; Robertson et al. 2019), there is also evidence of its functionality in the field of business and
administration, especially for its potential to provide a meticulous analysis of empirical data. Moscardo et al. (2017) use it to identify the factors that would improve the social capital of tourist destinations. It serves Hanohov and Baldacchino (2018) to recognize that knowledge as well as motivation influence the identification of sustainable entrepreneurship opportunities. Adisa et al. (2019) use it to reveal the influence that the patriarchal system has on the work and personal life of women in Nigeria.

The use of thematic analysis in this article made it possible to identify and analyze the benefits that cooperatives provide to the community. Its application is described next. First, the authors of this article became familiar with the data collected. To do this, the testimonies were transcribed and read repeatedly in order to identify initial patterns in the data. Second, initial codes were generated to capture the vision of the participants. In this phase, open coding (Saldaña 2013) was executed to allow us to reflect on the content of the data and honor the voices of the cooperative members. The codes generated were compared with each other and with the data, which made it possible to refine them. With the refinement of the codes, it was found that these could be grouped to form tentative themes. The relevance of the themes was reviewed by verifying their relationship with the codes, as well as with the empirical evidence that made them up. As a result, constant examination of the data resulted in 34 codes that were grouped into 10 key themes that describe the contribution of cooperatives to their communities. Then, a matrix was designed with the final categorization providing meaning to the results of this research. The matrix is shown in Table 2. Finally, an interpretative analysis was carried out to identify how the benefits that cooperatives in Mexico City provide to the community contribute to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 2. Categorization matrix.

| Key Issue | Categories |
|-----------|------------|
| 1. Social development | (a) Support for young people  
Search for equal opportunities and conditions that favor well-being in a community  
(b) Social cohesion  
(c) Commitment to society  
(d) Sports development in children and young people  
(e) Quality of life for clients |
| 2. Social and solidarity economy | (a) Local economy  
Encouragement of responsible consumption, paying attention to the values of social and economic responsibility as a fundamental element of its business model. Find a balance between competition and competitiveness, guaranteeing the rights of consumers, producers and workers.  
(b) Fair Trade  
(c) Local and fair consumption  
(d) Local and responsible consumption  
(e) Circular economy |
| 3. Decent employment | (a) Employment to vulnerable people  
Search for improving the living conditions of workers, as well as providing services that the State has not been able to ensure.  
(b) Decent employment  
(c) Employment for society |
| 4. Culture and traditions | (a) Preservation of traditions and culture  
Search for maintaining traditions within their community such as gastronomy, social events, medicine and native languages.  
(b) Preservation of traditional medicine  
(c) Promotion of culture  
(d) Rescue of original languages |
| 5. Social entrepreneurship | (a) Female empowerment  
Interest in solving problems that societies face, so that they can pursue by themselves their social and economic objectives.  
(b) Cooperative entrepreneurship |
| 6. Cooperative networks/Cooperative culture | (a) Collaboration with other organizations  
Development of its economic activity in accordance with principles that motivate the growth of a network of socio-economic and socio-political relationships, to generate trust for cooperation between companies, cooperatives and the scientific-technological system.  
(b) Collaboration networks between cooperatives |
Table 2. Cont.

| Key Issue                                                                 | Categories                  | (a) Health                  | Nutritional health |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 7. Health                                                                 |                             | (a) Health                  |                    |
| Preservation of autochthonous food crops, which prevent chronic degenerative diseases. |                             |                             |                    |
| 8. Preservation of the environment                                        |                             | (a) Preservation of the environment |                |
| Contribution to the sustainable management of natural resources, in addition to avoiding the depletion of natural resources. |                             |                             |                    |
| 9. Cooperative Culture                                                    |                             | (a) Promotion of the cooperative movement |                |
| Interest in sharing the cooperative philosophy with the community. It includes the promotion of its values and principles. |                             |                             |                    |
| 10. Integral training                                                      |                             | (a) Education               |                    |
| Interest in increasing access to education with the intention to improve the income of families. The reserve funds of these organizations are also used to finance the education of members and their families. |                             | (b) Partner training        |                    |

Source: Evidence from the collected data.

The themes identified in Table 2, although inductively emerged, they also reflect elements informed by the literature on practices, values and principles of cooperatives (ILO and ICA 2015; Juliá Igual and Martí 2008; Monge 2010).

4. Results

This section is organized into three parts. First, it presents the contributions that the cooperative organizations from CDMX provide to the community, from the perspective of their members. Second, the contributions presented are then put into perspective in relation to previous findings about the social benefits that these organizations provide to society. Finally, an analysis is developed to suggest that the contributions generated by cooperatives to the social environment also contribute to the fulfillment of some Sustainable Development Goals.

4.1. Benefits of Cooperatives to the Community

The benefits identified are presented below. Representative textual quotations exemplify the viewpoints expressed by cooperative members.

Social development. The cooperative members addressed, mostly, issues related to the evolution towards better living standards. According to them, cooperativism stimulates social cohesion, since the activities they develop allow for an integration of different actors of society that goes beyond an economic benefit: “They take into account the basic needs of partners and families, such as health, education and recreation; the priority is not exclusively economical”. Another way to achieve this cohesion is through sports promotion: “We do soccer tournaments that unite families, in this way our community is active”. These tournaments encourage young people to practise a sport, seeking to promote a spirit of cooperation and healthy competitiveness in the community. In fact, these activities keep young people away from drugs and vandalism. In addition, cooperatives are interested in generating new sources of employment in which peoples’ social rights are respected and promoted: “Our business model generates benefits for our partners, since they can have a stable profit, labor rights and social security”. Cooperative organizations also tend to offer healthier products, thus impacting on the quality of life of their customers: “The activity carried out contributes to the well-being and health and to improve the quality of life of the client”. Finally, cooperatives carry out activities that contribute to a social reintegration of individuals who have had conflicts with the law and who are not necessarily part of the cooperative, “We have participated in crime prevention programs helping former prisoners to communicate their experiences in schools and in different neighborhoods”.

Social and solidarity economy. The second theme portrays the search of an organization in which a group of individuals can effectively and efficiently manage the operation of
the cooperative, taking into account others’ opinions. Some organizations pointed out that the responsible consumption of products and supplies of local products represent one of their contributions, as stated in the following comments: “We support the development of solidarity economy by ensuring that our inputs come from other cooperatives, encouraging the local economy and favoring the cooperative movement in the city”; “In our cooperative, local products are consumed helping small producers, thus improving their economy”. Different cooperatives emphasized that they promote fair trade by offering affordable prices to their customers: “We contribute to the development of our community with the price we give our clients, supporting their economy”. Finally, there were those who promote the reduction, reuse and recycling of products, contributing to the circular economy principles: “We contribute to people recycling and reusing equipment, increasing the useful life of the phones and computers we repair”. All these statements reflect how cooperative organizations are well-aligned with the Social and Solidarity Economy, also trying to participate in a circular economy that supports a reduction of pollution.

Decent employment. Another topic identified has to do with the possibility of providing decent jobs. For cooperative organizations, providing a decent and well-remunerated job is not solely limited to the incorporation of partners, but also to offering job opportunities to the rest of the society members: “As a cooperative, we contribute to economic development by generating our own jobs and providing the opportunity for the inhabitants of the community to get a job to solve their daily lives”. There were different organizations that mentioned how providing a decent job, mainly to vulnerable people, reflects a principle of inclusion in society: “We generate jobs for people from the most vulnerable sectors ( . . . ), single mothers, old people, young people with drug addiction problems, indigenous people and the disabled; they are our priority to invite them to be part of our cooperative, either as partners or as project collaborators”. On the other hand, cooperative organizations seek to offer better family conditions and a good quality of life for their members, as the following comment shows: “The cooperative contributes to offer a productive activity for women; it is also close to their homes and does not neglect their families. It is expected to generate more resources to integrate more people, have greater availability of time and with it, to improve the quality of life of our partners”.

Culture and traditions. The preservation of the bundle of manifestations in which the traditional life of those who live in Mexico City was another benefit generated by the cooperatives. The above can be seen in the arguments given by the cooperative members about the recovery and preservation of culture and tradition: “Through our activities and facilities, we want to show the importance of preserving the values that once made us the main suppliers of food throughout the city to the community that surrounds us, ( . . . ) but above all, we value the importance to preserve the only living vestige of the Aztecs”; “For us, it is important to preserve and share the food flavors that have been lost. Gastronomy and culture are values that we promote because Xochimilco is a world heritage site, and it is important to publicize all the richness of our area”. The interest in preservation of culture and traditions is also linked to the preservation of traditional medicine: “Since the cooperative started, the temazcal service was extended to serve adults over 60 years old ( . . . ) it is a service that has been sustained in order to support this population with a certain vulnerability”. Finally, some cooperatives mention that the rescue of these manifestations, has to do with the original languages: “Our works are particularly cultural, which due to their quality and importance have gone to swell the cultural heritage of Coyoacán and Iztapalapa Delegations. With the last documentary video “El Huizachtépetl” we also contributed to the rescue of original languages, since this work is totally spoken in Nahuatl and subtitled in Spanish”. These organizations are clearly aware that their contribution goes beyond the economic aspect, recognizing that they also contribute to the recovery, preservation and diffusion of traditional practices of their communities.

Social entrepreneurship. Cooperatives also attempt, as a group of individuals, to create a new business capable of attending social needs. It is observed that social entrepreneurship
under the organization of cooperativism works as a stimulus for other individuals to create similar organizations: “The cooperative provides benefits to the community by promoting the formation of cooperative enterprises as a viable alternative to self-employment in a society where a culture of cooperativism is lacking”. Likewise, this way of entrepreneurship has served as a way of women empowerment: “We contribute to the economic development of people, since we generate our employment. We help to change the image of women because we develop activities that are not traditional; this seems important because the empowerment of our gender is one of our contributions”.

Collaborative networks. The different exchanges that cooperative organizations make with other actors is another social benefit generated by them. Some cooperatives mentioned that this type of alliance is beneficial for the society. Here are two examples: “With the collaboration of foundations and civil associations ( . . . ) we intend to help all areas of scarce resources to acquire a better lifestyle”; “Through strategic alliances, you can obtain work agreements and services ( . . . )”. “An example is the health days that were held in partnership with a civil organization, for the benefit of the partners, as well as for the population where they work”. Likewise, it is mentioned that the generation of collaboration networks among cooperatives is a priority since when these networks are generated, cooperatives are seen as a first purchase option: “Productive chains are generated with the cooperatives, and collaborative alliances are made so our services and products become a first choice option, before going to other markets to buy raw materials and services”. These comments show that the generation of alliances and relationships translates into benefits for society and cooperativism.

Health Care. Health care is another contribution that cooperatives claim to provide. It is observed that the contribution in health matters occurs through nutritious products and foods. Here are two examples that illustrate the above: “Our goal is to become consolidated as a real alternative in the area of health for society. With products (medicines) of good quality and made with plants that do not produce side effects, providing awareness and information so that the individual can improve their lifestyle”. “Our cooperative has a great impact in our community, because we provide our services to people with health problems, to which we prepare food low in fat and sugars”. In short, providing information about healthy food, as well as healthy and nutritious products, has become one of the contributions that cooperative organizations offer to society.

Preservation of the environment. The protection of the environment from any damage or danger is another social contribution mentioned by cooperatives. The preservation of the environment is achieved through activities that organizations describe below: “One of the purposes of the cooperative is to contribute to the strengthening of social and ecological impact, ( . . . ) supporting activities to disseminate the importance of environment’s pollution, rainwater recycling ( . . . ) and care of hives”. “We conserve and care for the environment through the elaboration of vermicompost. When we cook, we empty the organic garbage into earthworms that store a biological fertilizer that is used for the care and development of plants and trees”.

These examples show how cooperative societies preserve the environment with activities that are inherent to their productive processes.

Culture of Cooperativism. The cooperatives agreed that promoting the cooperative movement is one of its main contributions. The following statements of cooperative members provide some evidence on this: “The cooperative is very clear about the importance of generating a cooperative culture in society: we are convinced of generating an attitude that privileges the collective well-being”. “The cooperative is one of the pioneers of the area ( . . . ); our example has served for neighbors to come together and form their own cooperatives in order to achieve social and economic growth. As shown, for cooperative organizations, promoting the cooperative culture encourages the formation of new cooperatives and greater social and economic growth.

Integral training. Some cooperative organizations indicate that their contribution to society consists of developing or improving, through different activities, the intellectual
and moral faculties of the members of society. Here is a response related to this topic: “The cooperative has given courses to teach written communication and appreciation of music. These courses allow the socialization and the improvement of the cognitive state of participants.” Cooperative societies also consider that partner training is another important aspect of personal growth: “With the creation of new jobs for people in the community, we look for the training of the members, ( . . . ) we look for the development of the cooperative, as well as for those who collaborate with it”. “We seek to train our partners and workers, not only on work-related matters, but also on issues related to their health and their families”. These organizations consider that training activities should be directed to both the interior and exterior of the cooperative. According to cooperatives, training is very important to improve different aspects of their members and the society in general.

The 10 categories identified in this research resonate with previous literature on the social benefits generated by cooperatives.

(1) In relation to social development, previous literature (Amonarriz et al. 2017; Divar Garteiz-Aurrecoa 2013; Muciño 2013; Alfonso et al. 2016; Charterina 2015) has demonstrated the commitment that cooperatives have with their communities, as well as with vulnerable groups, for example, people living on the street (Magni and Günther 2014). The research findings show that cooperative organizations are committed in the sense as previous literature highlights. A clear example shows how cooperatives impact upon social cohesion so that young people from unprotected areas of the CDMX do not fall into unhealthy social practices. Similarly, the work of cooperatives can contribute to social reintegration, supporting the pre-released (from prisons) to have an active participation in society.

(2) Regarding the category of social and solidarity economy, the findings have much to do with what was pointed out by Divar Garteiz-Aurrecoa (2013), Piekielek (2010) and Vieta (2013). However, the findings of this paper are worth highlighting based on the case of Mexico City. The findings that show the support among cooperatives to sell their products between cooperatives already established and those that initiate economic activities are particularly important to the literature on this area.

(3) Decent employment is another category developed in the study. The findings of the study resonate with previous findings on job security (Amonarriz et al. 2017; Divar Garteiz-Aurrecoa 2013), training (Monge 2010; Magni and Günther 2014; Piekielek 2010) and employment for vulnerable people (Magni and Günther 2014). However, one of the aspects found in previous literature but not in our paper has to do with the benefits these organizations offer to their partners and employees, such as savings for retirement and health services (Magni and Günther 2014; Rakopoulos 2015; Vieta 2013). This may be because the organizations we analyzed are in a process of entrepreneurship in areas with economic difficulties. The literature also indicates that female empowerment can be observed, a situation that strongly resonates with the findings of this study that shows how work opportunities for single mothers can empower women in an extraordinary way.

(4) Regarding culture and traditions, it was expected from the beginning of this investigation that the findings of this study would be related to the ancestral practices and ethnic identity of the communities where the cooperatives are established, as has been found in previous studies by Ferguson (2018) and Piekielek (2010). This is because Mexico City has a long pre-Hispanic history. One of the aspects that can be added to the literature regarding this aspect is related to the preservation of ancestral agricultural practices through chinampas, or traditional medicine, as well as the rescuing of native languages.

(5) Social entrepreneurship is another category that shares aspects related to commitments to the development of the community, and responsibility with groups of people in vulnerable positions (Magni and Günther 2014). Returning to our results, it is
clear that decent employment for single mothers in the process of empowerment is a recurrent aspect within cooperatives of Mexico City.

(6) The collaborative networks category described in this study is inscribed in the same terms used by Alfonso et al. (2016) and de Miranda (2014), when they pointed out the importance of synergies among cooperatives with other actors such as consumers, the unemployed, suppliers, and customers, among others. In the same way, the participation of other actors such as universities, governments and research centers can be observed, as described by Vieta (2013).

(7) Health is another category identified in our findings. Our findings show that cooperatives of Mexico City are mainly focused on providing healthy and nutritious products to the community. However, previous literature also suggest that health services are provided to the members of the organization as well (Magni and Günther 2014; Rakopoulos 2015; Vieta 2013), an initiative not found within the cooperatives of Mexico City.

(8) Another category has to do with the preservation of the environment. In regards to these findings, there are similarities with previous literature that show how cooperatives care for the environment (Alfonso et al. 2016; Charterina 2015). The previous literature also shows a concern for cooperatives to promote a culture of improving the environment to both the families of the cooperative members and the groups with which the cooperatives are in contact (Carrasco 2005; Mozas Moral and Jurado 2006; Poyatos and Gámez 2009; Saz Gil and Ribalaygua 2008). However, this vision is not found in the cooperatives we studied.

(9) The category of the culture of cooperativism has important similarities with the contributions by Alfonso et al. (2016) and Monge (2010). Their findings show that cooperatives promote structures that allow for the democratization of decision-making, which was also identified in a small number of the organizations analyzed in this paper.

(10) Integral training is the last category presented in this research and has to do with the training cooperatives offer inside and outside of cooperatives. In this regard, Wu et al. (2018) showed how cooperatives promote the development of skills and capabilities outside cooperative organizations, especially in vulnerable groups. This support to vulnerable groups can be seen in the activities of the cooperatives in Mexico City, mainly within groups of people with visual weakness, schizophrenia, Down’s syndrome and autism.

It is important to highlight that the theoretical elements contrasted with the categories of this research have not necessarily been expressed in the literature as “social benefits of cooperatives”, as the title of this study suggests. This means that, although elements similar to the categories discussed in this article were found, they had not been labelled as such, but rather, as benefits of cooperatives in general. It is precisely the 10 social benefits of cooperatives identified in this paper that constitute its main contribution: a first empirical approximation of the social benefits generated by cooperatives (based on a sample of cooperatives of Mexico City).

4.2. Contribution of Cooperatives to the SDGs

As shown above, we can now clearly see how the benefits that cooperatives provide to both their members and their community contribute to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Table 3, below, shows this alignment.

SDG 1. No poverty proposes that men and women in vulnerable situations have access to economic rights that provide them with basic services to live adequately. In this sense, cooperatives have shown that the benefits they provide, such as decent employment and the strengthening of the social economy, are ideal for creating decent jobs that help vulnerable people to access the necessary resources for a better life. In addition, these organizations strengthen the local economy and fair-trade channels; therefore, their products become accessible options for those in need. The cooperatives that are the focus of this study have managed to generate local and fair-trade conditions in the communities where they operate,
as shown by the International Labor Organization and the International Association of Cooperativism (ILO and ICA 2015).

Table 3. Alignment between the SDGs and the benefits of cooperatives in Mexico City.

| SDGs Co-operatives Influence | Social Benefits Related to SDGs | Specific Actions Related to SDGs |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Goal 1: No poverty          | 3. Decent employment            | a. Employment for vulnerable people |
|                             | 2. Social and solidarity economy| b. Decent employment            |
|                             |                                 | c. Local economy                |
|                             |                                 | d. Fair trade                   |
| Goal 3: Good health and well-being | 7. Health                      | a. Nutritional health           |
| Goal 4: Quality education   | 10. Integral training           | a. Education                    |
|                             |                                 | b. Partner training             |
| Goal 5: Gender equality     | 5. Social entrepreneurship      | a. Female empowerment            |
|                             |                                 | b. Cooperative entrepreneurship  |
| Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth | 3. Decent employment | a. Employment for vulnerable people |
|                             |                                 | b. Decent employment            |
|                             | 8. Preservation of the environment | c. Employment for society |
| Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production | 2. Social and solidarity economy | a. Local and fair consumption |
|                             |                                 | b. Preservation of the environment |

Source: Own elaboration.

SDG 3. Good health and well-being proposes that people have access to universal health and that they are able to prevent diseases. In this sense, cooperatives have sought to offer products that contribute to the nutritional health of their consumers. In addition, some of these organizations offer informative talks for the prevention of heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes. These diseases are classified within the top five causes of death in Mexico. Bhowmik (2021) has also analyzed the contribution of cooperatives in health matters, showing how cooperatives are efficient in the implementation of health schemes proposed by governments.

SDG 4. Quality education aims to provide young people and adults with the knowledge and skills necessary to access decent jobs. As was shown in the previous section, cooperatives promote the professionalization of both their members and the people living in the communities where they operate. This was also suggested in previous work by ILO and ICA (2015) and UN (2015).

SDG 5. Gender equality seeks to provide economic rights to women, as well as to encourage their leadership in the political, economic and social spheres. Cooperatives have become a viable option for female entrepreneurship because their principles of democracy and equality protect their rights. It is also an ideal option for shared entrepreneurship. This SDG has been analyzed in the work by Martinez-Leon et al. (2020). She shows how cooperatives generate professional opportunities for women and promote gender equality by balancing the presence of women in managerial positions.

SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth seeks to generate employment with decent wages for vulnerable sectors, as well as to reduce unemployment among young people. For their part, cooperatives seek to generate sources of employment for the most disadvantaged sectors of society. These jobs respect their labor rights and train them to professionalize their activities. The study showed that cooperatives in Mexico City offer their members and collaborators decent jobs and opportunities for self-employment, especially for vulnerable people such as single mothers, older adults, young people and people with disabilities. These findings resonate with other studies such as García et al. (2020), Fernandez-Guadaño et al. (2020), Gutberlet (2021), Mastronardi and Romagnoli (2020) and Moon and Lee (2020).
that show how cooperatives have contributed to improving people’s working conditions in various contexts.

SDG 12. Responsible consumption and production aims to reduce the negative environmental impact. Cooperatives seek to preserve the protected areas of Mexico City. In addition, they contribute with new forms of recycling and environmentally friendly processes.

Through this review, it is feasible to suggest that the activities of the cooperatives studied in this article are closely linked to the SDGs issued by the UN. Although it is true that these organizations are not born from these objectives, the coincidence that is clarified in this article places them in the same way of observing the world.

5. Conclusions

This article shows how the goals of cooperative organizations in Mexico City resonate with several of the SDGs issued by the UN. This is shown, firstly, in how the members of cooperatives are aware and active in the search for social benefits, both internally and externally to their organization. Although it is true that cooperatives have economic intentions, the evidence provided in our study shows that this type of organization pursues both economic and social aspects. The methodological design used in the study allowed us to give voice to the cooperative members on how their organizations contribute to the community.

Overall, ten types of benefits were identified, namely: (1) social development, (2) social and solidarity economy, (3) culture and traditions, (4) decent employment, (5) social entrepreneurship, (6) cooperative networks (7) cooperative culture, (8) health, (9) integral training and (10) preservation of the environment. All these benefits are perceived as social benefits provided by the cooperatives of Mexico City.

It is important to mention that the 10 types of social benefits identified also resonate with the principles and values of cooperativism. In terms of cooperative principles, we can find the following: promotion of cooperative education and education in the solidarity economy and promotion of ecological culture. These two were clearly identified as two principles that permeate the findings of this study. Regarding cooperative values, we can mention mutual aid, solidarity, responsibility and concern for others as four closely related aspects that have much to do with the findings of the study.

It is important to underline that both principles and values of cooperatives are found within each of the 10 themes developed as social benefits that cooperatives offer to society. Just to mention a few, we observed (a) the concern and interest of this type of organization to provide decent employment to people living in vulnerable communities, (b) providing products and services that generate better conditions for society, and (c) an awareness of local, healthy and solidarity consumption, among many others.

Regarding how the contributions of cooperatives from Mexico City cooperatives fulfils the SDGs, it is reasonable to suggest a clear alignment among the identified benefits and the SDGs. The results suggest that the contributions made by cooperatives also add to the accomplishment of the following SDGs: goal 1: no poverty; goal 3: good health and well-being; goal 4: quality education; goal 5: gender equality; goal 8: decent work and economic growth; and goal 12: responsible consumption and production. In this sense, it is important to recognize that although the work of cooperatives in Mexico and in Latin America has an important social-economic aspect, it also has a strong component of solidarity. This may be one of the reasons that shapes the aforementioned alignment. This article invites to observe the actions of cooperative organizations, in conjunction with the UN vision, to adopt measures to fight poverty, protect the planet, and guarantee peace and prosperity for people. Without a doubt, cooperatives must be at the center of the public policies of nations that seek to participate in the fulfillment of the objectives set by the UN. Finally, this article aims to offer a perspective that shows the relationship between the social benefits provided by cooperative organizations and their contribution to the fulfillment of the SDGs.
The findings also give rise to new research opportunities, which would add to the results found in this study. In the first instance, it is important to triangulate findings on the benefits provided by cooperatives to society. This could be done through field research in the communities where the cooperatives participate.

A second avenue is suggested for a deeper exploration on how cooperatives contribute to the preservation of culture and traditions. With regard to this issue, our interviews are extremely rich and show how cooperativism can contribute to developing policies related to the reappropriation of ancestral cultures and traditions, particularly in regions where ancient cultures developed and have been lost over time, given the capitalist economy and modern policies that have not supported Mexican ancestral reinforcement. In this sense, an initial hypothesis for future research can be proposed: since cooperatives develop social and cultural benefits to society, the development of these organizations strengthens and revives the ancestral cultures of areas where there was once a cultural wealth.

Finally, a third and outstanding task is to identify several aspects for discussion: are the principles and values of this type of organizations the ones that mold the cooperative’s way of thinking and therefore give the social benefits found in this work? Or will it be that the people who participate in these organizations come with solidarity principles and are attached to this type of organization? Or, have the principles and values of cooperatives nothing to do with them, but rather, individuals and their nature who seek to develop human solidarity actions?

Finally, the fourth research option has to do with the relationship between cooperatives and the SDGs: this article concludes that there is a clear relationship between the two. Therefore, it is a terrain of discussion whether nations should adopt preferential public policies for cooperatives that contribute to the development of the SDGs, as proposed by the UN.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, O.D.F. and D.D.d.L.; methodology, O.D.F. and G.R.; validation, G.R.; formal analysis, D.D.d.L. and O.D.F.; investigation, D.D.d.L.; I.R. and O.D.F.; resources, D.D.d.L. and I.R.; writing—original draft preparation, D.D.d.L.; I.R. and O.D.F.; writing—review and editing, G.R.; supervision, I.R. and G.R.; project administration, D.D.d.L.; O.D.F.; I.R. and G.R.; funding acquisition, I.R. and G.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by Instituto Politécnico Nacional (SIP20211118 and SIP20211084).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects interviewed in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

**Acknowledgments:** We appreciate the support provided by Instituto Politécnico Nacional, UPIICSA, CIECAS, the Research Group on Cooperativism and Social Economy Organizations (GiCoops) and CONACYT.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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