



REUNIR:
*Magazine of Administration, Accounting
Sciences and Sustainability*

www.reunir.revistas.ufcg.edu.br



ORIGINAL ARTICLE: Submitted in: 27.09.2022. Validated on: 29.10.2022. Apt for publication in: 25.03.2023. Responsible Organization: UFCG.

After all, what benefits does fair trade bring? Understanding the influence of certification for the development of productive organizations

Después de todo, ¿qué beneficios aporta el comercio justo? Comprensión de la influencia de la certificación para el desarrollo de organizaciones productivas

Afinal, quais benefícios o fairtrade traz? Compreendendo a influência da certificação para o desenvolvimento de organizações produtivas

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KEYWORDS

Fair Trade;
Cooperativism,
Family Farming.

Abstract: Fairtrade represents a certification model based on the relationship between producers, traders and consumers, encouraging more responsible and ethical production practices. The number of research capable of pointing out the effectiveness of certification in the regions where it operates is still low, leaving gaps in terms of the influence of certification for rural producers organized in cooperatives. In this context, the study in question sought to understand the influence of Fairtrade certification for COORPOL member coffee growers. The qualitative research was carried out through semi-structured interviews, conducted with members of the organization. The categorical content analysis technique was used as a data analysis methodology and with the help of the Iramuteq software, the similitude analysis was performed. The research revealed that certification mainly meets the requirements of social improvements and environmental improvements, impacting the educational development of associates, opening opportunities for gaining knowledge in different dimensions. However, in the economic aspect, the benefits are still not very expressive since the payment mechanism of the highest market value has not effectively helped the producers.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Comercio Justo;
Cooperativismo;
Agricultura Familiar.

Resumen: El Comercio Justo representa un modelo de certificación basado en la relación entre productores, comerciantes y consumidores, que fomenta prácticas de producción más responsables y éticas. El número de estudios capaces de indicar la eficacia de la certificación en las regiones en las que opera es todavía escaso, lo que deja lagunas respecto a la influencia de la certificación en los productores rurales organizados en cooperativas y asociaciones. En este contexto, el presente estudio buscó comprender la influencia de la certificación de Comercio Justo en los cafeicultores miembros de la Cooperativa Regional de Industria y Comercio de Productos Agrícolas del Pueblo que Lucha - COORPOL. La investigación cualitativa se llevó a cabo mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas con cooperativistas de la organización. Se utilizó la técnica de análisis de contenido categórico para analizar los datos, y el análisis de similitud se realizó con la ayuda del software Iramuteq. La encuesta reveló que la certificación aborda principalmente las cuestiones de mejora social y medioambiental, con un impacto en el desarrollo educativo de los miembros, abriendo oportunidades para adquirir conocimientos en diferentes dimensiones. Sin embargo, en lo que respecta al aspecto económico, los beneficios siguen siendo poco significativos, ya que el mecanismo de pago del mayor valor de mercado no ha ayudado efectivamente a los productores.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Comércio Justo;
Cooperativismo;
Agricultura Familiar

Resumo: O Fairtrade representa um modelo de certificação baseada na relação entre produtores, comerciantes e consumidores, incentivando práticas produtivas mais responsáveis e éticas. Ainda é baixo o número de pesquisas capazes de apontar a eficácia da certificação nas regiões onde atua, deixando lacunas no que se refere a influência da certificação para produtores rurais organizados em cooperativas e associações. Neste contexto, o estudo em questão buscou compreender a influência da certificação Fairtrade para os cafeicultores associados da Cooperativa Regional Indústria e Comércio de Produtos Agrícolas do Povo que Luta – COORPOL. A pesquisa de cunho qualitativo foi realizada por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, conduzida com cooperados da organização. Utilizou-se como metodologia de análise dos dados, a técnica de análise de conteúdo categorial e com auxílio do software Iramuteq foi realizada a análise de similitude. A pesquisa revelou que a certificação atende principalmente os quesitos de melhorias sociais e melhorias ambientais, impactando no desenvolvimento educacional dos associados, abrindo oportunidades para ganho de conhecimento em diferentes dimensões. Todavia no quesito econômico, os benefícios ainda são pouco expressivos, visto que o mecanismo de pagamento do maior valor de mercado não tem efetivamente auxiliado os produtores.

Introduction

In order to meet a tangle of enterprises of low-income producers, mainly located in underdeveloped or developing countries like Brazil, fair trade has been gaining strength as a means to try to alleviate the injustices present in the conventional market. Developing from a movement, fair trade is based on the improvement of economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, and ethical conditions, benefiting both marginalized producers, distributors, importers, exporters, and final consumers (Cotera & Ortiz, 2009).

In theory, fair trade aims to work with those who have not had direct access to large markets, stimulating cooperation between them, in order to make them protagonists of local development (Schmelzer, 2010; Vail, 2010). Such a movement then has the potential to give voice mainly to groups marginalized by conventional economic relations, leading them to fair and solidary, transparent, long-term commercial relations, in order to dignify work, respecting cultural, ethnic and gender diversities (Raynolds, 2020).

In order to ensure rigorous practices to guarantee fair trade, numerous certification seals have been created over time. However, the “Fairtrade” certification instituted by the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) has become one of the most popular in the agri-food sector in the world (Child et al., 2014). To obtain certification, the producer must be linked to an enterprise with a democratic profile in the decision-making process. Thus, cooperatives and associations become the best options for Brazilian food producers, who traditionally already formalize such ventures, aiming at gaining scale in processes aimed at purchasing inputs, selling production and other collective purchases (Bossle et al., 2017; Cezar & Rosa, 2020a).

In addition to economic gains, associations and cooperatives also enhance the

social aspect of the enterprise, bringing together members with equal duties and rights, deciding via self-management, the directions to be taken in organizations (Bossle et al., 2017; Burke, 2010). This empowerment of voices in favor of democracy in the enterprise also allows the definition of projects that represent the real desire of the organizational members and not only respond to market or political interests propitious in organizations of food producers in small towns (Vásquez-León, 2010).

Allied to the economic and social proposal of associations and cooperatives, Fairtrade, established as a certification seal, allows such organizations to equally value the environmental proposal (Silva-Filho & de Moura Cantalice, 2011). The principles that guide the fair trade movement are translated into auditable standards, many of which are aimed at actions that preserve the environment and ensure the environmental sustainability of activities. Thus, it can be assumed that certification has the potential to contribute to increasing producer income, reducing the power of intermediaries (middlemen) in the market, increasing collective decision-making power, and ensuring environmental practices that reduce the impact of enterprise actions. (Alvarenga & Arraes, 2017).

Among the various groups of food producers who experience this reality, Fairtrade coffee farmers deserve special attention. In Brazil, about 48% of the coffee produced in the country comes from family farming enterprises (IBGE, 2018) and of the 51 organizations certified as Fairtrade producer organizations in the country, 26 (51%) are from coffee producers (FLOCERT, 2021). In addition to these values, family coffee farming is permeated by symbolic and subjective issues focused on guidelines such as the empowerment of rural women, the role of young people in the field, the use of production technologies, organic production, among many others, which amplify the need for a closer look at this reality.

Observing the dimension of Fairtrade certification for Brazilian coffee growers' cooperatives and, given the low number of researches related to the subject (Pereira & Cezar, 2021), the question is: what is the relevance and impacts of certification on Brazilian cooperatives? In this sense, this research aims to understand the influence of Fairtrade certification for coffee growers associated with the Cooperativa Regional Indústria e Comércio de Produtos Agrícolas do Povo que Luta – COORPOL. The cooperative in question is located in the city of Manhuaçu, Minas Gerais, Brazil, and is the only certified cooperative in the Zona da Mata Mineira region (FLOCERT, 2021). The Matas de Minas region has a Geographical Indication in the indication of origin modality since 2020, accounting for 24% of coffee production in the state (Minas, 2022).

In order to structure such a discussion, the article has, in addition to this introduction, the theoretical framework aimed at explaining fair trade and Fairtrade certification, and for discussing the importance of certification for cooperativism. Subsequently, the methodological procedures, results and discussion and conclusion are presented. The purpose of the article is not to exhaust the theme, but to awaken new reflections that bring answers and raise questions about the role of Fairtrade from Brazilian cooperatives.

Fair Trade and Fairtrade Certification

The fair trade movement emerged in Europe around 1960, after World War II, as an initiative by consumers concerned about environmental degradation and the gradual marginalization of small producers, caused by the model of commoditization of agriculture (Daviron & Vagneron, 2011). Since its genesis, this movement has sought to bring to the fore the mediation of the relationship between consumer and producer, contemplating an ethical model, not only for those involved, but also for the environment.

The purpose of justice emerges as an attempt to build new job possibilities for workers who find themselves in a process of marginalization and who face many difficulties during the commercialization process, aiming to reduce the asymmetries present in the logic of the market that feeds the current economic model (Raynolds et al., 2004; Schmelzer, 2010; Sylla, 2014).

Aiming at the global institutionalization of the movement, in 1988, the first Labeling Initiatives (LI) or National Initiatives for the certification of Fair Trade products were created, which sought to meet the needs of some Dutch social organizations in order to commercialize the coffee of a small cooperative in the Mexico (Cezar & Rosa, 2022).

This initiative served as a reference for the emergence of several LI's throughout Europe, North America, and Japan, such as: Transfair, in Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Italy, United States, Canada and Japan; Fairtrade Mark, in the United Kingdom and Ireland; Rättvisemärkt, in Sweden; and Reilu Kauppa, in Finland (FAIRTRADE, 2019a).

In 1997, the existing LI's in the central countries got together and developed the Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO), responsible for the Fairtrade brand and seal, currently being responsible for 80% of the World Fair Trade, becoming the largest certifier, with the purpose of establishing a worldwide standard for Fairtrade certified products (FAIRTRADE, 2019b).

For Vieira and Aguiar (2016), Fairtrade certification is one of the fastest growing socio-environmental certifications internationally, allowing the product available at retail to be identified by its consumers. The authors also point out that by following certain environmental, labor, and pre-established development criteria, certification favors small producers and workers from countries considered to be developing.

In order for organizations and enterprises to be certified as Fairtrade, the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) has structured 10 principles. These principles are verified by audits to analyze compliance with each criterion and the development of actions that guarantee their application. The principles are: I- Create opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers; II- Transparency and Accountability; III-Fair commercial practices; IV- Fair Payment; V- Guarantee of non-use of child labor and slave labor; VI- Commitment to non-discrimination, gender equity and women's economic empowerment and freedom of association; VII- Ensure good working conditions; VIII- Provide Training; IX - Promote Fair Trade and X- Respect for the Environment (WFTO, 2020).

In addition to the implementation of these principles, Fairtrade certification aims to offer marginalized producers the chance to "increase control over their own future (autonomy), have fair pay for their work, income stability and decent working and living conditions. life through sustainable development" (Fairtrade Foundation, 2022). To achieve these goals, certified products are sold mainly to the international market, aiming to reach consumers who seek products produced ethically and sustainably (Tang et al., 2016).

As a mechanism to guarantee the principles of justice, two measures were created to mediate and operationalize trade relations: the Minimum Price (Fair Price) and the Fairtrade Premium. The minimum price is a mechanism to protect the farmer, which aims to guarantee that production costs are paid, and that the producer will not sell his coffee at ridiculous prices. The Fairtrade Premium, on the other hand, stipulates a fixed value in addition to the amount paid for the product, that is, it is a sale bonus, whose application is decided democratically and formalized by an instrument characterized as

the Fair Trade Development Plan (FWDP) (FLOCERT, 2021).

Such instruments are essential so that producers, especially coffee producers, do not suffer financial losses due to numerous factors associated with production and storage and, out of necessity, sell the value of production below a level that does not at least cover production costs (Cezar & Rosa, 2020b; Geiger-Oneto & Arnould, 2011; Miranda & Saes, 2012). Fairtrade certification then becomes an ally to coffee producers, especially small ones, who rely on family labor and who increasingly demand recognition and value in the face of productive activity (Raynolds, 2020; Raynolds et al., 2004).

Currently, around 40% of world coffee follows the guidelines of some socio-environmental certification (Alvarenga & Arraes, 2017) such as Fairtrade certification. In Brazil, by 2022, 51 organizations were certified as producers of various products of plant origin, and of these, 26 (51%) are associations or cooperatives of coffee producers (FLOCERT, 2022). Such organizations stand out in the production and commercialization of coffee, which according to Alvarenga and Arraes (2017), has been increasing over the years. The authors point out that 25 cooperatives were responsible for the 152,341 bags produced in 2014, with 54% (82,137 bags) of this total originating from four organizations, 37% (56,373 bags) from eight cooperatives and 9% (13,831 bags) from thirteen cooperatives.

In addition to this economic potential that Fairtrade certification can generate in coffee producer organizations, Pedini and Machado (2014) state that certification impacts on improving product quality, respect for man and the environment, management and conservation of the soil and water, in the integrated management of pests, in the replacement of polluting inputs and in the

monitoring of procedures and traceability of the entire process. Thus, certification supports the economic, social and environmental tripod, adopting practices and actions so that each of these links is actually implemented in the reality of the projects.

Importance of certification for cooperativism or importance of cooperativism for certification?

Cooperativism and Fair Trade intertwine their relationships because of their principles, since both defend democratic models that seek to value individuals without distinguishing them, encouraging education as a tool for development and promoting support for the entire community around them. In addition, both aim at the fair distribution of results, avoiding the concentration of capital for just a certain group (Cezar & Rosa, 2020a).

Fairtrade recognizes the importance of cooperatives and associations in the development of certified producers, making it clear that only producers organized in these types of organizations can obtain Fairtrade certification for the production of some products such as coffee (FLOCERT, 2021). More clearly, Fairtrade certification is a certification aimed at small producers organized in associations and cooperatives, not certifying the producer individually, thus encouraging the sharing of results collectively (Bacon, 2010; Stenn, 2013).

This scenario happens due to the ability of these enterprises, especially cooperatives, to provide knowledge and technology to cooperative members, either through mechanization or new forms of production (Levi & Linton, 2003). According to Frederico and Barone (2015), although certification has a direct impact on several aspects, for the small producer, the most relevant benefits are: the increase in the price paid for coffee and the opening of new

markets.

Vásquez-Léon (2010) states that the participation of cooperative organizations not only results in an improvement in economic performance, but also encourages participation in democratic processes, fostering the civic culture of those involved. The intervention of cooperative members in the daily practices of the organization can provide members with constant critical reflection in the conduct of their reality, in contradiction to the demands and impositions of the market to which they are a part (Audebrand, 2017).

Cezar and Rosa (2020b) relate this increase in participation and critical intervention by members to a need for political action by members, making the cooperative's strategies guided by their real desires. For the author, this critical intervention makes it possible to distance cooperative members from the common reality of becoming just a group that blindly responds to market impositions. In parallel, the reduction and even elimination of intermediary agents in the process of commercializing their production can be seen, according to Viegas (2015), as one of the great benefits of articulating such Fairtrade producers, who democratically discuss the best opportunities, contributing directly to improving food and nutrition security.

One of the major economic benefits of certification is the Fairtrade Premium. This prize is a cash value, passed on to the organization, whose allocation occurs via the General Assembly. In addition, the following year, the results of using the Prize in assembly should be determined, aiming to guarantee transparency to the organization's cooperative producers (Loconto et al., 2021).

According to Rocha and Mendes (2011), the benefits of certification for organizations go beyond improving the participation of its members, being able to make them

economically strong and self-sustaining. For organizations, it is likely that there will be an improvement in the quality of the product, which, consequently, results in an improvement in sales, considering that the market for certified products has grown more and more, facilitating access to the international market.

In the social aspect, cooperatives must specify the salaries of employees in any sector and the payment must be made in regular periods, obeying the currency in force in the country, correctly verified on the payroll of each professional. In addition, the health and safety of workers and associates and professionals trained for any necessary event must be ensured (Raynolds, 2017).

It is also worth highlighting the advantages of certification for the community in which the cooperatives are located. Certified cooperatives must help improve housing conditions, roads, reforestation, garbage and solid waste collection, wastewater treatment, transportation, supply of drinking water, among others. In this way, it is possible that the cooperative not only promotes an improvement in the quality of life of the population, but that it is even capable of generating new jobs, which is another benefit for the local society.

In terms of the environment, environmentally correct practices must be ensured, which guarantee sustainability in all of its activities and operations. According to Rocha and Mendes (2011), Fairtrade certification has been shown to be positively effective in relation to environmental aspects, being able to reduce the volume of certain agrochemicals, reducing water contamination and reducing soil erosion. For the authors, such effectiveness is justified by the restrictions placed by certification on pesticides that are harmful to human and environmental health.

Methodological Procedures

This research can be classified as a study with a qualitative approach because, according to Godoy (1995), a certain phenomenon can be better understood through an integrated perspective, for this, the researcher must seek to analyze the phenomenon from those who are involved. collecting and analyzing data. In relation to the objectives, the research is classified as exploratory-descriptive, because, according to Stebbins (2001) this type of research aims to know the objectives of a given event to subsequently explain its causes and consequences.

In order to understand in greater detail, the main issues that impact Fairtrade organizations and their producers, a case study was carried out. The particular nature of the investigated locus, the subjective questions that emerge from the field and the appreciation of the subjects' experiences, seen from an exhaustively analytical perspective, brought up the need for this type of investigation (Siggelkow, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews (primary data) carried out with members of the Cooperativa Regional Indústria e Comércio de Produtos Agrícolas do Povo que Luta – COORPOL were used as an instrument for data collection. The organization was founded in 2006, made up of farmers from the Matas de Minas Region (MG) and headquartered in Manhuaçu-MG, seeking to promote a better life for the members in question. The cooperative belongs to the agricultural branch, affiliated to OCB, working with the commercialization of Arabica and conilon coffee.

For the application of the interviews, due to the current context of the pandemic caused by Covid-19, the communication tool, WhatsApp, was used, thus allowing the collection of data for scientific use. Through it, it was possible to record the interviews,

using the tool for sending audio, which was paramount due to the difficulty of coffee growers in maintaining stable communication through other communication platforms. This difficulty is linked to the continuous oscillations of internet in rural areas.

The strategy of semi-structured in-depth interviews was used. These were based on a list of points of interest used by the interviewer, through directed questions, aiming to allow the interviewee to speak freely as he reports to the marked guidelines (Sonpar & Golden-Biddle, 2008). In total, seven interviews were carried out with different associates, during the period from July to September 2021.

To determine the point of interruption of the interviews, the technique of "saturation sampling" was used, which consists of suspending new interviewees when the data obtained from the interviews become redundant for the analysis, that is, in the constant occurrence of the repetition of content by new participants, it is considered that there will be little addition to the content already obtained previously, ending the need for new interviews (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). The new interviewees started with a proposal for an indication configuring the snowball technique. This means that, at the end of the interview with a certain individual, he appointed the next participant who, like the first, appointed another individual, until the saturation process was reached.

For the analysis of the collected data, the content analysis methodology was used, which, according to Bardin (2015), represents a set of techniques used for the objective description of a certain content extracted through communication, observing the frequency of repetitive terms in units' text and their meanings. The content analysis was carried out through the execution of three stages, namely: I) Pre-analysis: focused on the organization of the analyzed data; II)

Analytical description: moment in which the information treatment process takes place, and III) Interpretation: stage based on induction (Bardin, 2015).

In the content analysis, Bardin's Categorical Analysis (2015) was used, which consists of the dismemberment of a certain set, grouping them in order to make sense with their similar. In this way, it was possible to analyze opinions, beliefs, actions, values, and other characteristics of the data obtained qualitatively. For the formation of categories, as guided by Bardin (2015), the exploration was carried out from a codification process that, in this case, dealt with the main subject spoken in the interviews by the cooperative members, portraying the codes, and that, later, they were transformed into the grouping of codes into units called subcategories, thus creating a process of progressive categorization capable of giving meaning to what was analyzed with a theoretical basis. The categories emerged a posteriori and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Organizational Aspects and Certifications	The constitution of Certified cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation period • Initial difficulties • Certification period
	Autonomy in decision-making processes on Fair Trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Assembly • Decision Making • Democratic processes
	Minimum Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee supply • Coffee demand
Producer Obligations	Responsibility Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use or non-use of pesticides • Conservation or non-conservation of springs • Conservation or Non-Conservation of Soil
	Responsabil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor

speeches are united with six words that define the other subjects: “Fairtrade”, “Quality”, “People”, “Cooperative”, “Price”, “Why / No”.

Through these words, it is possible to identify the antagonistic discourses of the cooperative members who are more concerned with the impact of Fairtrade on social changes (signaled with the words inserted in the “People” branch) and the cooperative members concerned with issues of producer obligations in relation to environmental changes (signaled with the words inserted in the “Why/Not” branch). Complementarily, the categories headed by the words “Fairtrade” and “Quality” show the perceptions of cooperative members regarding the benefits generated by certification for quality improvement. On the other hand, the possibilities of help by the cooperative and its members based on the certification minimum price mechanisms are represented respectively by the words “Cooperative and “Market”.

Such an analysis allows understanding the structure of the speeches; however it is necessary to better explore the content presented by the cooperative members. Thus, in sequence follows the content analysis, presented from the developed categories.

Organizational Aspects

The first category reflects the organization's initial steps, being constituted with a view to Fairtrade certification and seeking to meet the needs of its founding partners in acquiring better prices or even improving the quality of the coffee sold. The speech excerpts of the interviewees below demonstrate this picture:

The cooperative was already founded with Fairtrade certification and, in this period, it was not present in the cooperative. It was founded in 2006, 2007 and I joined in 2016, 2017...

(Interviewee 1).

The cooperative was born Fairtrade, understand? It was a German who was in the region at the time, and he saw the struggle of the people with the association he had in São João de Jacutinga and it seemed that he was there, he knew Fairtrade and he helped the people to set up the cooperative being born certified (Interviewee 3).

As demonstrated in the report of the cooperative members, the cooperative already comes up with the certification proposal, by indication of a German responsible for the certification (as demonstrated in the report of interviewee 3). Such a scenario is similar to what Cezar (2018) found when studying a cooperative of coffee growers in Espírito Santo who were certified after approaching a German member responsible for certification, finding in the organization characteristics already consistent with Fairtrade requirements.

Still in the constitution of the certified cooperative, it is noted that there was an influence on the choice of Fairtrade certification because other organizations of the same nature already certify and because of the price paid to the producer, as specified in the statements below:

(...) it was when we were in a difficult moment and the founding partners, through research, decided to participate in the project, working with documentation to participate and everything. And I thought the idea was spectacular because in addition to selling the coffee, the money went back to the cooperative through certification (Interviewee 2).

(...) we heard a lot about the coffee present in the south of Minas Gerais where they sold it for a better price and the value of coffee in the common market was very low in price, that is, we made sure that we really aimed to

improve prices (Interviewee 5).

It is worth highlighting from the reports of Interviewee 2, how much certification has the potential to better structure the organization. The use of the expression “the money returned to the cooperative through certification” makes it clear how much the cooperative members perceive the return that is invested in the organization with the sale of production. What is mentioned in the interviewee's speech is access to the Fairtrade Premium. As highlighted by Loconto et al., (2021) the main focus of the award is the investment in the organization's social projects, allowing the improvement of the management conditions and the living conditions of the cooperative members, provided that decision-making becomes fundamentally democratic.

In addition to allowing a better structuring of organizational activities, decision-making issues are also influenced by certification, since democratic spaces are also affected. The accounts below emphasize how democratic autonomy is established in the organization for Fairtrade related decisions:

Through an assembly, where all the producers are called, then each one brings their idea, the board also presents something, which is to be voted on and then everyone arrives at a consensus and, like this, how the Fairtrade regulations are passed for the producers, through regulation, they already know what it is, then through the assembly, a consensus is reached (Interviewee 2).

In relation to the certification norms, everything is decided in an assembly, these things like that, the whole staff gets together, decides how they are going to do it and tells each one to follow the certification according to what it asks for (Interviewee 7).

As established in the statutes of cooperatives and associations, the General Assembly is the

space used for decision-making, in which all members have the right to vote. It should be noted that, despite the autonomy to decide what will be implemented in the Cooperative, members cannot modify, add or exclude any norms arising from the certification itself, and can only decide whether or not to follow them.

It is worth highlighting that, even though Fairtrade allows for an expansion of just relations and a strengthening of the democratic role of members in cooperatives, there is extreme rigor to ensure that the principles that guide the fair trade movement are implemented. These principles are implemented through specific norms as demonstrated in the following report:

(...) the norms of Fairtrade are requirements that come from the top as a condition for maintaining the certificate, even though we can choose which norms to follow, in order to sell using the certification, you need to follow the norms that are already established (Interviewee 6).

According to the Public List of Conformity Criteria - Commercial Certification provided by Flocert (2017), the document responsible for translating the control points verified for the evaluation of conformity with Fairtrade norms, the organization must be aware that:

Not all criteria need to be met in all cases: some apply only to certain products and others apply only to certain types of operators. The scope of application is specified at the beginning of the criterion. To know which criteria apply to you, you must first identify what type of operator (payer, non-payer, transmitter) you are, which will depend on the type and position of the supplier from whom you purchase the Fairtrade product and the level at which the price is defined, as indicated by the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium Table" (Flocert, 2017).

Thus, it is essential to highlight that despite the rigor and impossibility of changing the main rules, it is possible to understand that they apply to specific scenarios, depending on the certification period in which the organization finds itself (Cezar & Rosa, 2022).

When observing the autonomy in the commercial processes of the cooperative organization, the farmer can choose whether or not to sell through Fairtrade, as stated by the interviewees in the following reports:

We still don't do futures trading, so if there's a market, they call the producers looking for coffee, if there's coffee, they tell us the value and see if we're interested in selling. That's how it works. Because the Fairtrade market takes a little longer, until you put together the lot, arrange the sale, until you receive the payment, it turns out that the producer can't always wait that long (Interviewee 5).

Every sale made, members are called to know and if possible, it is decided with everyone in the cooperative. The cooperative does not decide without the member being present (Interviewee 7).

It can be noted, from the report of interviewee 5, that there is no planning or work on the future market through Fairtrade marketing, generating a search and demand process between buyers and certified organizations. This note is in line with the arguments of Miranda and Saes (2012), who believe that the supply of Fairtrade coffee in the market exceeds the demand and, therefore, the quality of the coffee is related as an essential attribute in the market. Based on specific quality attributes, the product is sold and guarantees are paid to coffee growers (Raynolds, 2017). This flow, mainly for the final consumer, depends on the level of knowledge of the Fairtrade proposal and the interest in

consuming a product that is aligned with numerous social, environmental and economic practices (Annunziata et al., 2011).

For Alvarenga (2017), this fact can be observed in other places in the world and indicates that the certification may have a limited life, due to the excess supply of Fairtrade coffee in the market. Still in his analysis, the author states that the market for specialty coffees, like most Fairtrade coffees, has grown in relation to conventional coffees, growing approximately 15% a year, pointing to a positive sign for certification.

The sale of Fairtrade coffee is linked to the minimum price system based on a standardized table of values. However, despite this being a certification requirement, in practice it is not really guaranteed, as demonstrated in the report:

In our case, the coffee market, we have a minimum price, but we are not guaranteed to offer this price. In low years when the minimum price becomes interesting, nobody wants their coffee, we have gone three years in a row without selling a single bag. Now, in years with good prices like this year, all you have to do is have the coffee that finds the market (Interviewee 6).

The Minimum Price, according to Miranda and Saes (2012) is an additional amount to be received by producers who have Fairtrade certification, and this value is higher than the value of the traditional market. This confronts the cooperative members' report, where the values offered by the Fairtrade market appear to revolve around a supply and demand process. In addition, the non-guarantee of the minimum price in times of market decline, confronts the idealism proposed by the certification. According to Flocert (2021), the minimum price should be a monetary value proposed to pay the average production costs through market access, becoming a protection so that the producer would not be forced to

sell his production at a low cost.

Producer Obligations

From this category it became possible to understand three subcategories: Environmental Responsibility, Labor Responsibility and inspection.

Environmental responsibility brings to the fore the care for nature and biodiversity, an important characteristic for the possession and maintenance of Fairtrade certification, where the certified organization's members must be up-to-date with the specific impositions on production. The main requirements demanded and implemented can be observed in the reports below:

The cooperative member has to follow the Fairtrade regulation, which says what he should do with the garbage, with the springs with a water course, those who use pesticides have to undergo training (...) (Interviewee 5).

Our responsibilities in the case, the certifier who establishes, right? But for us (sic) it is selling our coffee, it is following what it establishes, for example, it is pesticides that it prevents from applying, hygiene on the property, these things related to the environment... (Interviewee 7).

It can be noticed, through the previous reports and, more specifically, that the relationship between producer, environment and certification are faithfully guided by the FLOCERT guidelines. According to the document entitled "Fairtrade Criteria for Small Producer Organizations", developed by FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL (2019, p. 24), "ensure that the members of your organization apply agricultural and environmental practices that contribute to a sustainable production system and that minimizes risks to health and the environment", are key actions for producers to improve production and protect biodiversity at the same time.

There is also a document called "List of Dangerous Products" provided by FLO, highlighting a total of 353 chemical products divided into categories: red list (Prohibited use), orange list (Restricted use) and yellow list (Marked list). There are 207 products described in the red list that represent products prohibited by Fairtrade certification for being highly dangerous to human health and the environment, 39 products described in the orange list that can only be used with technical prescription, care, in extreme infestation situations and diseases in production. Products on the orange list have a plan to eradicate their use by Fairtrade International; the 110 products described in the yellow list can also only be used with technical prescription, with caution, and are considered dangerous according to Fairtrade International (Aguiar et al., 2022).

Still regarding obligations, some COORPOL associates briefly mentioned labor responsibility as one of their obligations for the certification maintenance process:

(...) it is necessary to comply with the labor standards, whether you have an employee or not, with the country's labor standards, according to everything she asks (Interviewee 3).

(...) those who use pesticides have to undergo training with an employee and use PPE for safety (Interviewee 5).

Such reports are in line with the criteria document developed by Fairtrade International (2019), which mentions the importance of developing good working conditions for workers, in order to guarantee human rights and meet the standards established by his government and the considerations of the International Labor Organization (ILO). This scenario reinforces the need to pay guarantees to contracted workers, thus preventing slave labor and/or exploitation of the most vulnerable workers (Geiger-Oneto & Arnould, 2011; Raynolds, 2020; Tiburcio & Valente, 2007).

The importance of complying with these environmental, labor, and other responsibilities that were not mentioned by the associates is that, only with the approval of the audit, (performed in specific years), the products can be commercialized by the Fairtrade certification. From the reports, it was possible to identify the awareness of farmers about this obligation:

(...) one must respect and comply with the certification norms, provide the information required by the auditor during the audit, correct non-conformities if there is participation in the assemblies (Interviewee 4).

(...) when the audit comes, it audits the cooperative, calls the producers, asks the board, asking everything. Go to the producers' house, in the warehouse (Interviewee 5).

The audit is a mandatory phase for obtaining and maintaining Fairtrade certification. As pointed out by FLO: "it must accept audits at its facilities and subcontracted facilities and provide information to the certification body when required" (Flocert, 2021). According to Stelzer (2017), in his study on the model and procedures for applying for Fairtrade certification, this auditor will preferably be from the region of the one requesting the audit, so that he knows the local language, is familiar with the culture and even with the legislation of the region. This situation, despite bringing farmers closer to those who will evaluate the standards, since they can better understand the local challenges, does not mitigate, nor does it exempt from meeting what is required.

Socioeconomic Impacts

During the research, a possible increase in financial income was assumed after the certification sales process. Once the certification institutes a set of rules that organize production, the rural property and the

cooperative, there is thus a tendency to improve income, from the increase in the sale of production of better quality. However, in the case studied, this increase happens, but it is not as expressive, as shown in the reports below:

After I started producing Fairtrade coffee, we started to do the math, before we harvested the coffee, we took the coffee and didn't calculate how much a bag of coffee was worth and that was very good for me, because I know how much a bag costs bag of coffee for me, and I value what I do and produce (Interviewee 2).

Another social impact of organizing the property, of being on top of the market, because Fairtrade, when there is a very large price differential, it is difficult to find a market (Interviewee 5).

The training that is required by Fairtrade brings more information, which results in more assertive production with better quality and use for us producers. (Interviewee 6).

As farmers reported (particularly Interviewee 5), there is no significant difference in the sale of their products, as the appreciation of Fairtrade products in the market makes commercialization difficult. While the mechanism of minimum pricing is applied, the Fairtrade proposal for payment of a higher value may be creating a system in which buyers wait for the price to drop.

Nonetheless, there are gains, such as the knowledge acquired, which is responsible for bringing more financial security to the organization. As reported by Interviewee 6, access to this knowledge is mainly derived from the training required by Fairtrade certification and market knowledge acquired through the certification sales process.

When questioning the cooperatives about partners in the training process, three names were identified as key agents in the process: the cooperative itself, the Rural Learning Service (SENAR), and the Rural Technical

Assistance and Extension Company (EMATER), as indicated in the following statements:

These trainings are usually provided by EMATER, so our main training partner is them (Interviewee 1).

So, EMATER helped us with some courses, we won another one in a contest, to improve quality too, and then we are there, not making big names, but we are with quality coffee (Interviewee 2).

The cooperative gives some courses, such as, for example, the post-harvest one, but lately we have been doing a lot with EMATER and also SENAR, they have been great partners of ours. (Interviewee 3).

These trainings not only resulted in access to knowledge that could be used to increase the financial outlook of the associated farmers or improve the management of their resources but were also able to improve the quality of the coffee produced by them using informed strategies. The improvement and improvements in quality parameters are highlighted in the reports below:

(...) due to the training that the cooperative offers, whether in the nutrition part or the parts of soil analysis or leaf analysis, their importance, the importance of you following this soil analysis to put the right fertilizer, the part from post-harvest the care you need to take with the coffee in drying, storage, that the coffee is better (Interviewee 1).

It improved a lot through the quality of the coffee, the drink, right? Before, we harvested coffee and thought it was just the hard drink, but there is also special coffee and we started to produce special coffee and we were even awarded by Fairtrade as special coffee (Interviewee 2).

It can be seen from the speech excerpts that there was an increase in the level of quality of the coffee produced by them, through the

support of the organization in having a technician to accompany the tasting and guide the producers, opening space even for awards in the middle of specialty coffees. The speech of interviewee 2 emphasizes this improvement when using the expression “we harvested coffee and thought it was just the hard drink”, since this type of drink comes from conventional coffee without the implementation of great techniques of cultivation, harvesting, drying, and roasting.

This aspect of improving coffee quality with proper technical assistance after obtaining certification was also observed by other authors who researched the impacts of certification. Rocha and Mendes (2011) stated that coffee produced by producers after obtaining Fairtrade certification had its quality increased by at least 75% due to the aid and knowledge obtained.

Attention should be paid to the quality of products produced by an ethical format, as the consumer values the product more due to its quality and price than just the way the product was produced. Producing ethically does not provide any guarantee that the product will be purchased by consumers, so there must be constant concern for the quality of the product produced, as this is an essential sales attribute (Fridell et al., 2008; Levi & Linton, 2003; Yamoah, 2014).

However, as pointed out by Santos, Pereira and Cezar (2021) in a study with consumers of Fair Trade products in the United States, although price and quality are the main decision makers when buying these products, the degree of awareness about the issues involved, “breaks the tie” between certified and non-certified products.

Although certification did not result in a significant increase in income, according to associates, there was no significant increase in production costs after certification, as shown in the reports:

For me, it wasn't more expensive, but for you to start producing coffee, you need to adapt the property and there are some

good ones. But if you follow Fairtrade, it's even cheaper, because the guys there, the neighbors, spend on pesticides and I myself don't use any, I can even use those on the list that are not prohibited, but there's everything right and you will have spent because you have to spend on PPE and these things are not cheap (Interviewee 3).

There was no cost increase, I had to increase attention and time to control production (Interviewee 6).

Despite the consensus among producers that there is no considerable cost increase after the certification process, it is important to mention that each property indicates different needs for change in order to comply with marketing standards. From certification these different needs can arise, becoming a fine line between distrust and investment in the new project for a given producer, but that in the long term will make all the difference to its final production cost. The fact is that the costs, when paid by the cooperative, are spread among all the members, making them more accessible and almost imperceptible, since everyone is part of a wide network of work and support.

This fact is perceived by Kharel and Middendorf, (2015) who identified that organizations in networks have competitive advantages, increasing the bargaining power of cooperative members and reaching a greater number of markets. It is worth mentioning that, in relation to initial costs and audit costs, the cooperative members do not associate such expenses with something that must be included in the total production costs, thus generating a considerable increase in the total final costs.

The two major costs involved in certification are the costs related to the certification process and the costs that will ensure compliance with the standards stipulated by the certification, which may end up demanding a considerable amount of investment. However, despite the initial costs

with certification, in the long term it is notorious that they are reduced and even allow a reduction in the total cost of production, in view of the reduction or elimination of the use of pesticides, as observed in the speech of interviewee 3.

Final Considerations

Based on the results shown in this study, it was possible to understand the influence of Fairtrade certification on coffee growers associated with the aforementioned cooperative. It is noted that, in the case of COORPOL, the formalization of a cooperative by farmers is not the result of a requirement made by FLO-Cert to obtain the certification seal. This represents a tool to guarantee autonomy, made possible through the General Assembly, thus guaranteeing the voice and desires of the cooperative members.

In this way, it is clear that the decision to maintain the certification and comply with the requirements is a response from the articulation of the producers, based on their particular demands. As they use production methodologies that reduce the impact on the environment and promote good relations with workers, the mechanisms determined by certification are shown to be aligned with the majority choices of the cooperative members and not as an imposition of the organization.

In addition, with certification, we noticed an impetus for the empowerment of the cooperative member, made possible through training provided by the cooperative and its partners to obtain knowledge. Offering such training through a network of partners develops a greater sense of belonging to those involved, who also become part of the learning network. This learning network, in turn, allows the socialization of the knowledge learned by the partners and implemented in the daily work, becoming fundamental for the normative set of rules to make sense for the

producers and for the difficulties to be alleviated.

In short, we can highlight that Fairtrade brings more social and environmental benefits in the studied cooperative than economic benefits. As the minimum price is a guarantee for the producers, this mechanism manages to hold back the euphoria and desperation of selling the production at all costs. The highest values paid in the market, and which should signal a good horizon are not yet part of the reality of COORPOL's coffee producers. However, as the Fairtrade Premium guarantees investment in projects to improve the social and environmental conditions of those involved, this is the engine that feeds the hopes of producers and creates the conditions for true local economic development.

In order to contribute to new investigations of this nature, we suggest that the analysis of certification impacts be carried out with more organizations, seeking not only to increase the relevance of the results obtained in this research, but also to point out other neglected aspects. Issues such as farmers' understanding of the Fairtrade Development Plan (FDP) and the Fairtrade Premium deserve greater articulation, from different theoretical lenses that address the role of actors, institutions, and norms for development socioproductivity of its members.

Given the limitations mainly in relation to access to farmers for data collection that occurred in this study due to the COVID-19 pandemic, new research that expands the different views not only of cooperative members, but of managers of cooperatives and local public institutions, can to help better, future studies that see in Fairtrade a means to face the unequal and unfair relations of production, distribution and consumption not only of coffee, but of other certified products.

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