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THE EXPERIENCE OF SPANISH COOPERATIVES FOR UKRAINE’S ECONOMY

Heorhii Petrov

PhD student of the Department of International Economic Relations and Logistics
Educational and Scientific Institute “Karazin Institute of International Relations and Tourism Business”
V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University
Svobody sq., 4, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61022
e-mail: heorhii.petrov@student.karazin.ua
Phone number: +38 (050) - 082 - 43 - 23
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1413-8997>

The article examines the Spanish cooperative sector—one of the most advanced and diversified cooperative systems in the European Union—in the context of its practical relevance to building Ukraine’s cooperative economy. The subject of the research encompasses the organizational models, legal frameworks, financial mechanisms, and socio-economic outcomes of Spanish cooperatives across various economic sectors. The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Spanish cooperative experience and, based on these findings, formulate specific recommendations for the reform and development of the cooperative sector in Ukraine. To achieve this objective, the following research tasks were addressed: investigating the historical evolution of the Spanish cooperative movement; characterizing the legal framework governing cooperative activities in Spain; analyzing key models of cooperative enterprise, namely the industrial (Basque), agricultural, and credit models; identifying the specific features of social cooperatives and their role within the social economy system; and conducting a comparative analysis of Spanish and Ukrainian cooperative legislation. The research methodology relies on comparative legal analysis, the historical-genetic approach, systems analysis, the synthesis of foreign experience, and the statistical analysis of data from industry associations and academic literature. The research findings indicate that the Spanish cooperative sector, which comprises over twenty thousand active cooperatives across a wide range of industries, demonstrates high economic resilience, social efficiency, and innovation potential. This is evidenced, in particular, by significantly lower unemployment rates during economic crises in regions with a well-developed cooperative sector. Special attention is given to the Basque industrial cooperative model, with its internal financial mechanisms and dedicated educational system; the Andalusian olive and wine agricultural cooperatives; and social cooperatives operating in healthcare and social services. The study concludes that to develop a robust cooperative sector, Ukraine requires: a systemic reform of its outdated cooperative legislation aligned with EU best practices; the advancement of cooperative education and culture at all levels; the expansion of credit union networks and solidarity funds; the formation of horizontal cooperative associations and federations; and the active utilization of the cooperative model as an instrument for the post-war reconstruction of communities and regions, as well as the social integration of vulnerable populations.

Keywords: *Cooperative, cooperative model, Spain, Basque model, agricultural cooperative, credit cooperation, social economy, economic recovery of Ukraine, European integration.*

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Problem Statement. The current state of the Ukrainian economy is characterized by a profound structural crisis, which has been severely exacerbated by the full-scale armed invasion by the Russian Federation in February 2022. The destruction of production infrastructure, large-scale forced migration, GDP contraction, the degradation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), declining employment rates, and the disruption of traditional economic ties altogether place the search for alternative, non-standard, yet time-tested models of economic organization at the top of the agenda.

In this context, the cooperative form of enterprise—which merges private initiative with collective responsibility and a social mission—acquires particular relevance. Unlike conventional capitalist corporations, cooperatives are oriented not only toward profit maximization but also toward satisfying the needs of their members and the broader community. This makes them uniquely resilient in times of socio-economic shocks. At the same time, the cooperative sector in Ukraine remains relatively underdeveloped, fragmented, and devoid of modern institutional support, which necessitates a profound analysis of foreign practices to adopt and adapt the most effective models.

Spain represents one of the European Union member states where the cooperative movement has achieved a highly developed and highly diversified character. The country's cooperatives operate across a wide spectrum of economic sectors, demonstrating a robust capacity to combine market efficiency with the principles of social justice and democratic governance. The Spanish cooperative system has traversed a complex developmental path—evolving from modest mutual-aid associations of the 19th and 20th centuries into powerful transnational structures that are competitive on a global scale. This experience, encompassing organizational models, legal frameworks, state support mechanisms, and social efficiency, holds substantial scientific and practical value for Ukraine, which is currently on the path to European integration and requires a fundamental restructuring of its economic system.

Literature Review. The scientific discourse surrounding cooperative development in Spain and its relevance to transition economies is reflected in the works of international scholars, which can be categorized into several interconnected thematic areas. The foundational tenets of the cooperative movement are systematically detailed in documents by the International Co-operative Alliance [15] and in studies dedicated to the Rochdale Principles [4]. The legal underpinnings of the Spanish cooperative system are examined in depth by Vargas Vasserot [26], while the institutionalization of public policy within the social economy is analyzed by Catalá Estada, Savall Morera, and Chaves-Ávila [3]. Furthermore, the broader context

of Spanish cooperatives as a constituent component of the EU social economy is presented in an earlier study by Petrov [20].

The Basque industrial cooperative system is investigated in the works of Imaz Alias et al. [14], Retegi and Igartua [22], and Marcuello [17]. Spanish agricultural cooperation serves as the focal point in studies by Díaz-Caro and Mirón-Sanguino [5], Giagnocavo [10], Sánchez-Martínez et al. [24], Montegut et al. [18], and Ferrer et al. [7]. Social cooperatives and the gender dimension of corporate governance are explored by Bretos Fernández et al. [1], Esteban-Salvador et al. [6], and García Companys [8]. Additionally, the financial resilience of cooperatives is analyzed by Sala-Ríos [23], while digital transformation and the eco-social transition are addressed by Olaizola-Alberdi et al. [19] and Cambra González [2].

Among the publications tailored to Ukrainian realities, notable contributions have been made by Gerasymenko et al. [9], Kropivko and Mykytyuk [16], Honcharenko et al. [11; 12], and Svytnov et al. [25]. Despite a substantial body of research in these related fields, comprehensive comparative studies that systematically align the Spanish cooperative experience with Ukraine's specific needs—particularly in the context of European integration and post-war reconstruction—remain underrepresented in the academic literature. This gap defines the relevance and scientific novelty of this paper.

Research Objectives and Tasks. The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Spanish cooperative system—specifically its structure, legal framework, sectoral features, and socio-economic outcomes—and to develop scientifically grounded recommendations for adapting leading Spanish practices to the Ukrainian economy in the context of post-war reconstruction and European integration reforms. To achieve this objective, the following research tasks have been formulated:

- To elucidate the essence and evolution of the cooperative movement in Spain and determine its position within both the national economy and the EU social economy system;
- To investigate the Basque model of industrial cooperation as the most prominent and extensive example of a successful cooperative complex;
- To characterize the specific features of Spanish agricultural cooperatives, cooperative credit institutions, and cooperatives operating in education and social services;
- To analyze the legal and regulatory framework governing cooperative activities in Spain and compare it with current Ukrainian legislation;
- To identify the primary barriers to the development of the cooperative sector in Ukraine and propose concrete measures to overcome them based on the Spanish experience.

Object and Subject of the Research. The object of this study is the Spanish cooperative system in its systemic dimension, including its organizational, legal, and economic components. The subject of the research encompasses the mechanisms, principles, and institutional conditions under which Spanish cooperatives operate, which can be leveraged to build an efficient cooperative sector in Ukraine.

Methodology and Data Sources. The research methodology relies on systems analysis, comparative legal analysis, statistical data processing, and structural-functional modeling. The data source for this study comprises official statistics from Spain and Ukraine, analytical reports from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), alongside academic publications by domestic and international scholars.

Main Results. The cooperative tradition in Spain traces its roots back to the mid-19th century, when the first worker and consumer societies emerged in the industrial regions of Catalonia and the Basque Country [15; 21]. However, a robust cooperative movement truly developed amidst the social and economic upheavals of the 20th century, assuming distinct characteristics across different eras depending on the prevailing political climate [21]. The mid-20th-century dictatorship paradoxically stimulated the growth of cooperatives to some extent, as they served as a mechanism for collective survival under a repressive regime—particularly in regions with strong regional identities, such as the Basque Country and Catalonia.

The transition to democracy and the establishment of the constitutional order in 1978 unlocked new opportunities for cooperative development. This period saw the adoption of relevant regulatory acts at both the central government and autonomous community levels, the formation of a state support system, and the establishment of close cooperation between the cooperative sector, trade unions, and civil society [20; 26]. Over the subsequent decades, Spanish cooperatives experienced rapid expansion, marked by significant quantitative growth, technological modernization, scale of operations, and social impact.

Today, Spain's cooperative sector stands as one of the most advanced within the European Union [20]. According to data from statistical agencies and industry associations, the country boasts over twenty thousand active cooperatives, which unite more than one million founding members and provide employment for hundreds of thousands of salaried workers. The aggregate economic output of the cooperative sector accounts for a substantial percentage of the country's GDP. In certain industries—most notably agriculture and food retailing—cooperatives hold dominant or prominent market shares [5; 18].

The cooperative enterprise model in Spain spans an exceptionally broad spectrum of sectors, including industry, construction, agriculture, fisheries, transportation, retail, education, healthcare, social care, mass media, telecommunications, the IT sector [11], tourism, and financial services. This extensive diversification is a primary indicator of the maturity of the Spanish cooperative system, setting it apart from the cooperative sectors of most other nations, where cooperatives remain predominantly concentrated in the agricultural and consumer spheres [3; 11; 13].

The legal framework governing cooperative activities in Spain represents a complex, multi-tiered regulatory system that reflects the quasi-federal nature of the Spanish state [26]. The Constitution of 1978 institutionalized the right of autonomous communities to enact their own cooperative legislation, which subsequently led to the emergence of dozens of regional laws on cooperatives—each characterized by its own distinct features and priorities. Concurrently, a general law on cooperatives operates at the national level, establishing uniform baseline standards and core principles for cooperative organization [20; 26].

This system of legal pluralism offers certain advantages, such as the capacity to accommodate regional specificities and foster institutional competition to create optimal conditions for entrepreneurs. However, it also introduces disadvantages associated with legal uncertainty and operational friction for cooperatives whose activities span multiple autonomous communities. Although Spanish legal scholars and cooperative federations have repeatedly advocated for greater harmonization of cooperative legislation, the intricacies of Spanish federalism have thus far impeded a consensus on the matter. For Ukraine, which is currently shaping a unitary yet decentralized legislative landscape, the Spanish model of cooperative regulation serves as a valuable laboratory of structural options suitable for comprehensive analysis and critical reflection [9; 12].

The most renowned and extensively studied cooperative system in Spain is the Basque industrial cooperative complex. Its formation began in the mid-1950s within a small industrial town in the Basque Country, initiated under the guidance of a Catholic priest and social thinker who successfully synthesized the tenets of Catholic social teaching with the practical demands of cooperative enterprise [14; 17; 22]. The foundational cooperative of this movement was a modest manufacturing facility producing domestic appliances, established by a cohort of young technical specialists utilizing their own limited savings. Driven by a democratic governance structure where each member possessed an equal vote, and profits were equitably distributed among all participants, this initial enterprise expanded rapidly, attracting new members and generating spin-off entities in adjacent sectors

[14; 17]. Over the subsequent decades, this original cooperative evolved into the cornerstone of an extensive cooperative conglomerate, encompassing hundreds of individual cooperative enterprises across diverse industries—ranging from metallurgy and mechanical engineering to retail, finance, education, construction, and research and development.

The uniqueness of the Basque industrial cooperative system lies in its capacity to seamlessly merge the principles of cooperative democracy with robust strategic planning, efficient financial management, and continuous innovation [22]. A pivotal organizational innovation was the establishment of its own cooperative credit institution in 1959, which accumulated the savings of cooperative members and reallocated financial resources among various entities within the conglomerate in accordance with strategic priorities [16]. This internal bank effectively became the «heart» of the cooperative ecosystem, enabling the funding of new projects, mitigation of temporary financial distress in individual cooperatives through mechanisms of internal solidarity, and preservation of the overall strategic coherence of the network.

Another critical pillar of the Basque model was the creation of a dedicated system for technical education and vocational training. Proprietary educational institutions—spanning from primary technical schools to a fully accredited higher education university—guaranteed a steady influx of qualified personnel who were thoroughly socialized into the cooperative movement and shared its core values [14]. From its inception, the educational dimension of the Basque cooperative project functioned as an institutional vehicle for the cultural reproduction of cooperative ethics, training not merely specialized technicians but conscious actors within a system of collective enterprise.

The socio-economic outcomes of the Basque industrial cooperative complex are highly demonstrative. Over several decades, this conglomerate has demonstrated a level of resilience during economic downturns that significantly exceeds that of conventional private enterprises operating within the same sector. Specifically, during the economic crises of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, when private firms resorted to mass layoffs or total liquidation, these cooperatives generally deployed alternative adaptation mechanisms. These included shortening working hours, implementing temporary across-the-board wage reductions for all members, and relocating personnel to new or more successful business units.

The underlying principle of «each member is responsible for all» meant that an individual cooperative experiencing financial distress could rely on the support of the entire network, thereby avoiding the threat of bankruptcy and mass redundancies. This approach ensured a unique level of social stability and the preservation of human capital, which served as a source

of long-term competitive advantage. Scholars observe that during the deep economic crisis in Spain between 2008 and 2013, when the national unemployment rate reached a catastrophic 25–26%, the unemployment rate in the Basque Country remained substantially lower—a phenomenon largely attributed to the buffering effect of its highly developed cooperative sector [22; 23].

The process of internationalization within the Basque cooperative complex, which accelerated rapidly during the 1990s and 2000s, presented the system with profound challenges regarding the preservation of its cooperative identity amidst global competition [14]. When establishing manufacturing facilities and retail networks abroad, the conglomerate faced a fundamental question: should the principles of cooperative membership and democratic governance expand to foreign subsidiaries, or should these entities operate as standard corporate affiliates?

In practice, outside of Spain, the cooperative conglomerate primarily registered traditional joint-stock or limited liability companies without extending cooperative membership rights to foreign employees. This decision, driven by pragmatic considerations of legal and operational simplicity, drew criticism from cooperative economics theorists who viewed it as a departure from the foundational principles of the cooperative movement. The debate surrounding this issue remains highly relevant today, as it touches upon the fundamental question of whether a cooperative can retain its core essence while scaling to a transnational level.

Agricultural cooperatives represent the second most important and, in certain respects, the most populous segment of the Spanish cooperative sector [5; 18]. As Spain is one of the leading agrarian states in the EU—ranking among the top producers of olive oil, citrus fruits, grapes, pork, and diverse vegetables—the cooperative movement has played a pivotal role in enhancing the competitiveness of Spanish agriculture within the EU single market and global supply chains [5; 10; 24].

According to official data, Spain's agrarian cooperatives unite over 1.1 million members, predominantly family farmers and small-scale agricultural producers, and handle the commercialization of a substantial share of the country's total agricultural output. The sector's national representative body acts as one of the most influential lobbying groups in agricultural policy, actively shaping Spain's national position during negotiations and reforms of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The functional architecture of Spanish agricultural cooperatives encompasses several key operational areas, enabling a closed-loop cycle from initial production to final retail distribution. First, cooperatives facilitate collective procurement and storage by constructing and operating warehouses, cold-storage units, grain

Table 1

Key milestones in the development of the Spanish cooperative movement

Period	Key events	Significance
1850s	First worker and consumer societies in Catalonia and the Basque Country	Origins of the movement
1956	Founding of the first Basque cooperative by Fr. Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta	Birth of the MCC model
1959	Establishment of a dedicated cooperative credit institution	Financial self-sufficiency
1978	Constitution: autonomous communities gain the right to enact cooperative legislation	Regulatory foundation
1990s–2000s	Internationalisation of the Basque conglomerate; expansion into global markets	Scaling up
2011	Law on Social Economy enacted — Spain among the first in the EU	Institutional recognition
2020s	Platform cooperativism, digital transformation, gender equality in governance	Contemporary challenges

Compiled by the author based on: [14, 15, 21, 26]

Table 2

Key performance indicators of the Spanish cooperative sector

20,000+ Active cooperatives	>1 million Founding members	1.1 million Agri-cooperative members	70–80% Olive oil market share
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Compiled by the author based on: [5, 20, 10]

Table 3

Approximate sectoral distribution of Spanish cooperatives

Sector	Share of cooperatives (%)	Relative significance
Agriculture and food industry	~30%	Very high
Retail trade and services	~22%	High
Industry and construction	~20%	High
Education and healthcare	~13%	Moderate
Finance and credit	~8%	Moderate
Other (IT, media, transport, etc.)	~7%	Emerging

Compiled by the author based on: [3, 11, 13, 20]

Table 4

Approximate cooperative market shares in key agri-food subsectors of Spain

Subsector	Cooperatives (%)	Other (%)	Strategic note
Olive oil production	75%	25%	World leader; coops hold dominant share
Wine and viticulture	50%	50%	PDO-certified; active enotourism sector
Citrus fruits	60%	40%	Export-oriented; key EU supplier
Meat and poultry	30%	70%	Growing coop presence in processing
Cereals and grains	45%	55%	Significant logistics infrastructure

Compiled by the author based on: [5, 7, 18, 24]

elevators, and processing facilities. This infrastructure enhances product quality control and standardization, allowing cooperatives to enter the market with large, uniform batches of commodities. Second, cooperatives act as highly efficient intermediaries in supply chain management. By purchasing inputs—such as fertilizers, plant protection products, seeds, fuel, and machinery—in bulk for all members, they achieve substantial economies of scale and minimize production costs.

Third, cooperatives actively expand their own processing capacities, transforming raw agricultural outputs into finished products with higher added value, including olive oil, wine, canned fruits and vegetables, and meat products [25]. Fourth, leading agricultural cooperative groups have established proprietary

distribution networks for both the domestic market and international export. This enables them to independently market and distribute their members' products across major markets in Europe, Asia, and North America, eliminating the need for commercial intermediaries.

A prominent position within Spain's agricultural cooperative movement is held by entities specializing in the production and processing of olive oil, predominantly concentrated in Andalusia [24]. Spain is the world's leading producer of olive oil, and the cooperative sector controls the lion's share of this output—ranging from 70% to 80% depending on the harvest year and region. Olive cooperatives unite tens of thousands of smallholder farmers whose landholdings

typically do not exceed a few hectares. These structures provide smallholders with access to state-of-the-art pressing and refining facilities, quality control laboratories, certification systems, and international trading platforms—resources that would be entirely inaccessible to them as individual operators.

Furthermore, the strategic application of Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) and Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) has proven to be an effective tool for securing premium market status for cooperative products, enabling higher price margins and generating sustainable competitive advantages. The experience of Spanish olive cooperatives is highly valuable for the Ukrainian agricultural sector, particularly regarding the need to elevate the competitiveness of domestic agro-products and develop collective branding systems within the saturated European market.

Spanish wine cooperatives offer another compelling example of successful collective organization in agribusiness [7]. Famous wine-producing regions such as Rioja, Penedès, Priorat, La Mancha, and Valencia feature extensive networks of wine cooperatives that seamlessly merge viticultural traditions with modern winemaking and marketing technologies. These cooperatives are frequently certified under national Designations of Origin (DO)—the Spanish equivalent of the French appellation d'origine contrôlée—which guarantees compliance with strict production standards and permits premium product positioning. Remarkably, wine cooperatives invest heavily in the tourism sector by developing extensive enotourism infrastructure, including tasting rooms, guest houses, wine museums, and curated «wine routes.» This demonstrates the capacity of cooperatives to engage in long-term strategic planning, expanding beyond the traditional production cycle to deliver comprehensive consumer experiences and diversify institutional revenue streams.

Credit cooperation constitutes the third strategically vital pillar of the Spanish cooperative sector [16]. Spanish cooperative credit institutions possess a long standing tradition, tracing their lineage back to the rural mutual-aid funds of the 19th century. Today, these institutions are categorized into two primary segments: rural cooperative banks (*cajas rurales* and *cajas cooperativas*), which predominantly service the agricultural sector and small businesses in rural areas, and cooperative credit unions structurally linked to industrial cooperative conglomerates.

As full-fledged participants in the national financial system, Spanish cooperative banks are subject to the same prudential regulations enforced by the Bank of Spain and the European Central Bank (ECB) as conventional commercial banks. Crucially, they preserve their distinct cooperative ethos: member-owners retain equal voting rights in governance irrespective of their capital share, a significant portion of profits is either

reinvested or distributed among members, and the institutional mission explicitly prioritizes the socio-economic development of the local communities in which they operate.

Despite trailing large commercial banking groups in asset size and geographical coverage, Spanish cooperative banks possess several distinct competitive advantages. In particular, they traditionally play a pivotal role in financing small and medium-sized agribusinesses, cooperative enterprises, and local development initiatives—segments where large commercial banks are typically less active due to the low profitability of small-scale transactions. Benefiting from a deeper understanding of local socio-economic conditions and closer proximity to their clientele, cooperative credit institutions are capable of more effectively assessing credit risks associated with small businesses and agricultural producers.

The financial crisis of 2008–2013 severely impacted cooperative banks, primarily due to their excessive credit exposure to the real estate sector, which necessitated a series of structural mergers and recapitalizations within the industry. Overall, however, Spain's cooperative banks navigated the crisis with greater resilience than traditional savings banks (*cajas de ahorros*) and several commercial banks, thereby validating the unique stability inherent to the cooperative business model [16].

For Ukraine—where credit cooperation remains in an embryonic state and the banking system suffers from systemic challenges related to capital concentration, low institutional trust, and limited access to finance for small enterprises—the Spanish cooperative credit experience serves as a highly valuable benchmark. The Ukrainian network of credit unions, which experienced a notable surge in the 1990s and 2000s, faced severe disruption over the subsequent decade due to flawed regulatory frameworks, managerial misconduct, and deposit outflows amidst broader macroeconomic shocks.

Reforming Ukraine's credit union system along the lines of the Spanish *cajas rurales*—by implementing enhanced prudential regulation, establishing robust deposit guarantee schemes, and integrating unions into broader cooperative networks—could provide a decisive breakthrough in securing accessible financing for the agrarian sector and small entrepreneurship, particularly in rural areas where conventional commercial banks maintain virtually no presence.

The Spanish cooperative system is an integral component of the broader social economy paradigm, which achieved institutional and legislative recognition in Spain significantly earlier than in most other EU member states [3; 12; 20]. The enactment of the national Law on Social Economy in 2011 placed Spain at the vanguard of nations establishing a comprehensive legal environment for entities that prioritize human

capital and social missions over shareholder profit maximization [3].

Under this legislative framework, cooperatives are recognized as the primary and central actors of the social economy, which also encompasses mutual-aid societies, associations, foundations, and social enterprises. The state commits to fostering the development of social economy entities through a structured system of financial, fiscal, educational, and informational measures, while ensuring their institutional interests are integrated into national economic and social policymaking. This approach contrasts sharply with the current landscape in Ukraine, where social entrepreneurship remains a marginal phenomenon, lacking a distinct legislative identity and systematic state support.

Educational cooperatives represent a distinctive feature of the Spanish cooperative landscape that is scarcely developed in most other countries [1]. Spain features numerous cooperative schools—numbering several hundred nationwide—where the teaching faculty simultaneously acts as the co-owners and managers of the educational institution, which is governed on the principles of cooperative democracy. These schools emerged primarily in response to unmet demand from parents in specific districts or as the manifestation of distinct pedagogical concepts championed by educator teams. Research indicates that cooperative educational institutions generally exhibit higher levels of faculty organizational commitment, lower staff turnover rates, and broader community and parental engagement compared to conventional state or private schools. This framework could provide a compelling model for Ukraine in the context of educational decentralization and the search for novel governance structures for educational institutions under severe budgetary constraints.

Cooperatives in healthcare and social services constitute another dimension of the Spanish cooperative system with profound relevance for Ukraine. Cooperatives of physicians and medical personnel, social worker cooperatives, and entities providing elderly and disability care are highly prevalent across Spanish autonomous communities—particularly in Catalonia and the Basque Country, where the social economy possesses robust historical traditions [1; 13].

Catalan medical cooperatives specializing in primary healthcare have achieved widespread international recognition as an exemplary integration of public healthcare funding with a cooperative model of service delivery. This synthesis demonstrates higher levels of patient satisfaction and operational efficiency compared to both purely public and private healthcare models. For Ukraine, which is navigating a profound healthcare crisis exacerbated by the wartime destruction of medical infrastructure, the cooperative model of medical service organization could serve as a vital supplement to state and private frameworks,

particularly for addressing healthcare needs in small towns and rural areas.

Democratic governance is a foundational tenet of the cooperative enterprise, distinguishing it from all other forms of corporate organization [4; 15]. In Spanish cooperatives, this principle is institutionalized through a sophisticated system of representative bodies that blends direct and representative democracy depending on the scale and complexity of the cooperative. The General Assembly of members serves as the supreme governing body, where each member possesses a single vote, completely independent of the size of their capital contribution. For day-to-day management, the General Assembly elects a supervisory board or a board of directors, which in turn appoints or elects executive directors. In larger cooperatives, a delegate model is deployed, wherein the General Assembly comprises elected representatives rather than the entire membership, thereby ensuring a quorum and maintaining the efficiency of the decision-making process. Empirical studies of Spanish cooperatives confirm that member participation rates in general assemblies and internal elections are significantly higher than those of minority shareholders in public corporations, validating the substantive, rather than merely nominal, character of cooperative democracy.

The governance architecture of the Basque industrial cooperatives is the most sophisticated and documented among all Spanish cooperative models [14]. Alongside the General Assembly and the Board of Directors, these cooperatives feature a Social Council (*consejo social*)—a dedicated body that represents the interests of member-workers regarding working conditions, social policy, and profit distribution. Consequently, the Basque model integrates two distinct forms of collective participation: ownership participation (via the General Assembly and capital contributions) and labor participation (via the Social Council and employment relations). This dual-dimensional structure is widely recognized as a primary factor driving the highly efficient resolution of labor disputes within cooperatives compared to traditional capitalist enterprises, where the conflict between capital owners and salaried employees is structural and inherently adversarial.

An analysis of the Spanish cooperative experience allows for the formulation of several concrete lessons for Ukraine, spanning both strategic and operational dimensions. The first and most critical lesson is the necessity of a systemic reform of Ukraine's cooperative legislation, aligned with the best practices of EU member states, including Spain [9; 26]. The current Law of Ukraine «On Cooperation,» enacted in 2003, is conceptually obsolete and fails to meet the contemporary demands of the entrepreneurial environment. It does not account for modern forms of cooperative activity (such as social cooperatives and solidarity economy networks) and lacks effective mechanisms for state support.

The overhaul of this legislative framework must encompass a clear definition of cooperative types and their legal statuses, the introduction of fiscal incentives for cooperative enterprises that allocate a significant share of their profits to the collective needs of their members, and the implementation of simplified registration and reporting procedures for small-scale cooperatives.

The second key lesson derived from the Spanish experience is the fundamental importance of cooperative education and culture in building a sustainable cooperative movement [16]. The Basque model convincingly demonstrates that the genuine success of a cooperative project is unattainable without fostering a distinct cooperative identity and a value system transmitted across generations through targeted educational efforts. In Ukraine, cooperative themes are virtually absent from the curricula of secondary schools and higher education institutions. This absence perpetuates a flawed perception of the cooperative as a remnant of the Soviet-era «collective farm» (kolkhoz) system, rather than as a modern, efficient enterprise. Introducing specialized educational programs on cooperative entrepreneurship at all levels of the education system, supporting cooperative training centers, and conducting broad public awareness campaigns are vital prerequisites for generating demand for the cooperative organizational form among Ukrainian entrepreneurs and communities.

The third lesson highlights the need to establish an efficient financing system to drive the development of the cooperative sector [16]. The Spanish experience indicates that an internal cooperative credit institution, which aggregates member savings and reinvests them into the expansion of cooperative enterprises, serves as a decisive factor for the long-term resilience and growth of a cooperative complex. For Ukraine, this underscores the necessity of restructuring its network of credit unions to focus on servicing the cooperative sector and small businesses. Furthermore, it demands the development of mechanisms granting cooperatives access to state lending and subsidy programs, which are currently tailored almost exclusively to conventional corporate business models. Additionally, Spain's experience underscores the viability of implementing dedicated solidarity funds—intra-cooperative mutual insurance mechanisms that enable more profitable cooperatives to support struggling ones within shared associations.

The fourth vital lesson concerns the strategic role of cooperatives in the process of post-war recovery and economic reintegration [20]. The International Co-operative Alliance has repeatedly documented how, in various nations recovering from armed conflicts or natural disasters, cooperatives have emerged as highly effective instruments for the rapid economic revival of affected communities. This is primarily due to their

capacity to mobilize local resources and human capital without a strict dependency on external investors.

Amidst large-scale wartime destruction and the urgent need to restore the productive potential of entire regions in Ukraine, the cooperative model offers a fundamentally vital advantage: it enables thousands of smallholders who have lost a significant portion of their assets to pool their remaining resources and collectively rebuild or launch new productive activities independent of external capital or corporate shareholders. This is particularly relevant for the agricultural sector in liberated territories, where cooperative frameworks can facilitate the rapid reorganization of small, fragmented farms into competitive, market-oriented production units.

The fifth lesson of the Spanish cooperative experience for Ukraine lies in the vital significance of horizontal cooperative networks and federal associations [20]. The efficient functional architecture of the Spanish cooperative movement is built not merely upon isolated cooperatives, but rather upon an extensive, multi-tiered system of associations—federations, confederations, and second-tier cooperatives (cooperativas de segundo grado). These structures provide their members with a wide array of shared services, including legal counseling, accounting, marketing, logistics, personnel training, technical assistance, and institutional representation before public authorities.

In Ukraine, such horizontal structures within the cooperative sector are virtually absent or remain in an embryonic state. This deficit deprives small and medium-sized cooperatives of access to essential support services that they cannot afford independently due to scale constraints. Consequently, constructing a robust network of cooperative unions and federations is an indispensable prerequisite for establishing a genuine cooperative economy in Ukraine, rather than a fragmented collection of isolated cooperative enterprises.

The sixth critical element of the Spanish experience deserving close attention from Ukrainian policymakers is the well-developed framework of social cooperatives and solidarity economy networks that facilitate employment and social integration for vulnerable populations [1]. A distinct organizational form within this segment is the «social initiative cooperative» (cooperativa de iniciativa social), where service providers and service consumers simultaneously hold membership—a design that fundamentally distinguishes them from both traditional non-profit organizations and conventional commercial firms.

These entities function as a buffer between purely market-driven and purely state-administered forms of social protection. They offer greater operational flexibility and efficiency than bureaucratic state agencies, while maintaining a stronger social orientation than profit-driven enterprises. For Ukraine—amidst large-scale population displacement, a rising number

Table 5

Comparative analysis of cooperative systems: Spain and Ukraine

Criterion	Spain	Ukraine	Assessment
Core cooperative law	Modern, detailed, regularly updated	Law of 2003 — outdated; lacks modern forms	Reform needed
Regional legislation	Own statutes in 17 autonomous communities	Absent	Consider
Law on Social Economy	Enacted in 2011	Absent	Priority
Cooperative credit	Well-developed; integrated into banking system	Embryonic; weak regulation	Critical gap
Education & promotion fund	Mandatory by law; tax-exempt	Absent	Missing
Horizontal networks	Federations, confederations, 2nd-tier coops	Virtually absent	Build required
Social cooperatives	Widespread, legally defined	Marginal phenomenon	Developing
Cooperatives in education	Several hundred cooperative schools	Nearly absent	Potential
Cooperatives in healthcare	Recognised; Catalonia is a global benchmark	Virtually absent	Relevant
Digital transformation	Platform cooperativism; e-governance	Early stage	Perspective

Compiled by the author based on: [9, 12, 16, 20, 26]

Table 6

EU financial instruments relevant to the development of Ukraine's cooperative sector

EU Instrument	Target area	Relevance for Ukrainian cooperatives
COSME Programme	SME support	Access to financing and markets for small and medium cooperative enterprises
EU Structural Funds	Regional development	Infrastructure investment in liberated territories; rural development in post-war recovery
European Social Fund (ESF)	Employment and social integration	Social cooperatives for veterans, IDPs, and vulnerable population groups
SCE Statute (2003)	Cross-border cooperation	Registration of European cooperatives; access to single EU market after accession
LEADER Programme	Rural areas	Strengthening agricultural cooperatives and local action groups in rural communities

Compiled by the author based on: [3, 19, 20]

Table 7

Priority lessons from Spanish cooperative experience for Ukraine

№	Lesson	Priority	Spanish experience basis
1	Systemic reform of cooperative legislation in line with EU standards	Critical	Cooperative Act; Law on Social Economy (2011)
2	Development of cooperative education and culture — from school to university	Critical	MCC educational system; cooperative schools
3	Building an efficient cooperative finance and credit union system	Critical	Caixa Rural; MCC credit institution (1959)
4	Leveraging cooperatives as instruments of post-war economic recovery	Important	ICA experience in post-conflict recovery
5	Forming horizontal networks — federations and 2nd-tier cooperatives	Important	COCETA, CEPES federations; agri-coop networks
6	Developing social cooperatives for the employment and integration of vulnerable groups	Relevant	Cooperativa de iniciativa social model

Compiled by the author based on: [3, 9, 12, 14, 16, 22]

of veterans requiring resocialization, and the erosion of traditional social safety nets—social cooperatives could perform a critically vital function. They could secure employment and social integration for vulnerable groups in a landscape where neither the state nor the market can adequately address these challenges independently.

Ukraine's ongoing integration into the European Union, with active preparations underway across multiple sectors, unlocks additional opportunities to

develop its cooperative sector in alignment with EU best practices. Cooperative regulation within the European Union is grounded in the 2003 EU Regulation on the Statute for a European Cooperative Society (SCE). This legal instrument allows cooperatives to register and operate across the entire single market rather than being restricted to individual member states.

Upon accession to the EU, Ukrainian cooperatives will gain access to this pan-European mechanism,

opening new avenues for cross-border cooperation, participation in joint initiatives, and direct access to markets across all member states. Even now, during the pre-accession stage, Ukraine could actively leverage funding from EU programs dedicated to supporting the social economy—such as the COSME program, structural funds, and the European Social Fund—to build cooperative infrastructure and build institutional capacity.

A comparative analysis of cooperative legislation in Spain and Ukraine reveals profound disparities in substantive content, regulatory detail, and systemic cohesion [12; 26]. The Spanish Law on Cooperatives provides exhaustive provisions governing the internal organization of cooperatives, the formation and utilization of institutional funds, the rights and obligations of members, fiscal regimes, and procedures for liquidation and asset transfers.

Of particular significance is the institutional mechanism of the mandatory «education and cooperative promotion fund» (*fondo de educación y promoción cooperativa*). This legal framework mandates that a specific portion of a cooperative's surplus must be allocated strictly to member education and cooperative advocacy; this capital cannot be distributed among members and is exempt from taxation, thereby incentivizing continuous corporate investment in human capital. A comparable regulatory mechanism is entirely absent in Ukraine, representing a significant gap in domestic cooperative law.

The regional dimension of cooperative development constitutes a critically important component of the Spanish experience, meriting distinct analysis within the context of Ukraine's decentralization reform [18; 20]. Spanish practice demonstrates that the most dynamic expansion of the cooperative sector occurs within regions characterized by robust regional identities, autonomous legislative competences, and proactive regional cooperative policies. The Basque Country, Catalonia, and Valencia—the vanguard regions of cooperative development in Spain—possess their own regional cooperative statutes that are, in several aspects, more progressive than national legislation.

Furthermore, these regions feature extensive localized support networks, including regional cooperative development agencies, start-up subsidies for new cooperatives, grants for member education, and preferential access to regional public procurement contracts. Under Ukraine's ongoing local self-government and decentralization reforms, subnational administrative tiers could assume a significantly more active role in stimulating cooperative entrepreneurship. This is particularly viable given that specific Ukrainian regions—most notably the Carpathian region, Polissya, and Central Ukraine—possess deeply rooted traditions of agricultural and consumer cooperation that warrant institutional revitalization.

The gender dimension of cooperative development in Spain has likewise attracted substantial attention from researchers and practitioners [6; 8]. Despite the historical overrepresentation of men within industrial and agrarian cooperatives, social, educational, and healthcare cooperatives exhibit predominant or substantial female representation among both general membership and executive leadership roles. Spanish cooperative organizations are increasingly institutionalizing gender-equitable governance practices, ensuring parity in elected bodies, and launching cooperative-based women's entrepreneurship programs.

For Ukraine—where women are assuming increasingly critical roles in economic life amidst wartime realities and the large-scale mobilization of the male population—the cooperative business model could serve as an effective instrument for women's economic self-determination and the cultivation of new community leaders, particularly within rural areas and the social services sector.

The digital transformation of the cooperative sector represents another contemporary frontier where Spanish experience can provide valuable insights for Ukrainian practitioners [2; 19]. Leading Spanish cooperative associations are actively deploying digital platforms for internal governance, member engagement, and remote voting in general assemblies, as well as for advancing e-commerce and digital product marketing. Concurrently, novel configurations of «platform cooperatives» are emerging. These are digital platforms managed strictly on cooperative principles, wherein both service providers and consumers hold equal membership and co-ownership rights.

This architecture offers a compelling alternative to traditional «gig economy» models, which typically strip independent contractors of social protections and a fair share of generated revenue. For Ukraine, which features a rapidly expanding digital economy alongside increasingly pressing concerns regarding the social security of self-employed and platform workers, Spanish-style platform cooperativism offers a highly relevant model for academic and policy discourse.

Conclusions. The findings of this study demonstrate that the Spanish cooperative system is a unique phenomenon in terms of its scale, diversification, and social efficacy, standing as one of the most compelling global examples of successfully synthesizing market efficiency with the principles of democratic governance, social justice, and regional embeddedness. The Spanish experience encompasses a comprehensive spectrum of cooperative configurations—ranging from large-scale industrial manufacturing groups to small-scale agrarian, educational, and social initiatives—which together constitute a cohesive cooperative economy that is organically integrated into the broader structure of Spanish society, playing a pivotal role in securing employment, social protection, and balanced regional

development. For Ukraine, this structural experience represents an invaluable repository of institutional designs, operational mechanisms, and policy solutions that can be strategically adapted to domestic realities to drive post-war reconstruction, agrarian reform, decentralization, and pre-accession alignment with European Union standards. Fully unlocking the potential of cooperative entrepreneurship in Ukraine, however, demands synchronized policy actions across several parallel vectors simultaneously: a systemic overhaul of domestic cooperative legislation to match EU standards, the construction of robust multi-tiered frameworks for state and regional institutional support, the fostering of a contemporary cooperative culture through dedicated educational curricula, the capitalization of cooperative enterprises by strengthening the credit cooperation network, and the facilitation of horizontal cooperative unions and federal associations capable of delivering shared services and providing robust institutional representation at both national and international levels.

The prospects for subsequent scientific inquiry within this domain are tied to conducting granular,

sector-specific analyses of the Spanish cooperative framework, with a specific focus on engineering concrete operational adaptation models for priority segments of Ukraine's economy, namely the agrifood complex, social services, credit cooperation, and the emerging platform economy. Furthermore, expanding this research into comparative analyses encompassing other advanced cooperative systems within the EU—such as those of France, Italy, Finland, and the Netherlands—is highly viable to construct a comprehensive matrix of best practices suitable for implementation within the Ukrainian macroeconomic environment. The practical utility of such research is directly dictated by the urgency of the structural challenges confronting Ukraine today: the imperative to pioneer novel organizational frameworks capable of reviving war-torn economic systems, restoring community livelihoods, generating sustainable employment, and successfully integrating the domestic economy into the paradigms of socially responsible entrepreneurship that define the European Union standard.

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27. Scientific Supervisor – V. Honcharenko, Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor, Professor of the Department of International Economic Relations and Logistics, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (Kharkiv, Ukraine).

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Петров Георгій Андрійович, аспірант кафедри міжнародних економічних відносин та логістики, Навчально-науковий інститут «Каразінський інститут міжнародних відносин та туристичного бізнесу», Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна, майдан Свободи, 4, м. Харків, Україна, 61022, e-mail: heorhii.petrov@student.karazin.ua, Контактний тел.: +38 (050) - 082 - 43 - 23, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1413-8997>

ДОСВІД КООПЕРАТИВІВ ІСПАНІЇ ДЛЯ ЕКОНОМІКИ УКРАЇНИ

У статті досліджується кооперативний сектор Іспанії як одна з найбільш розвинених і диверсифікованих кооперативних систем Європейського Союзу в контексті її практичної значущості для розбудови кооперативної економіки України. Предметом дослідження є організаційні моделі, правові засади, фінансові механізми та соціально-економічні результати функціонування іспанських кооперативів у різних секторах господарства. Метою статті є комплексний аналіз іспанського кооперативного досвіду та формулювання на його основі конкретних рекомендацій щодо реформування та розвитку кооперативного сектору України. Досягнення поставленої мети передбачало вирішення таких завдань: дослідити історичну еволюцію іспанського кооперативного руху; охарактеризувати правову базу кооперативної діяльності в Іспанії; проаналізувати ключові моделі кооперативного господарювання — виробничу (баскську), аграрну та кредитну; виявити специфіку соціальних кооперативів та їхнє місце в системі соціальної еко-

номіки; здійснити порівняльний аналіз іспанського та українського кооперативного законодавства. У процесі дослідження застосовувалися такі методи: порівняльно-правовий аналіз, історико-генетичний підхід, системний аналіз, метод узагальнення зарубіжного досвіду, а також аналіз статистичних даних галузевих асоціацій та матеріалів наукових публікацій. Результати дослідження свідчать, що іспанський кооперативний сектор, який об'єднує понад двадцять тисяч активних кооперативів у широкому спектрі галузей, демонструє високий рівень економічної стійкості, соціальної ефективності та інноваційного потенціалу, що підтверджується зокрема суттєво нижчим рівнем безробіття в регіонах із розвиненим кооперативним сектором у кризові періоди. Особливої уваги заслуговують баскська виробнича кооперативна модель з її внутрішнім фінансовим механізмом та власною системою освіти, андалуські оливкові та виноробні аграрні кооперативи, а також соціальні кооперативи у сфері охорони здоров'я та соціальних послуг. Висновки дослідження полягають у тому, що Україні для розбудови повноцінного кооперативного сектору необхідні: системне реформування застарілого кооперативного законодавства з урахуванням найкращих практик ЄС; розвиток кооперативної освіти та культури на всіх рівнях; розбудова мережі кредитних спілок і фондів солідарності; формування горизонтальних кооперативних об'єднань і федерацій; активне використання кооперативної моделі як інструменту повоєнного відновлення громад і регіонів, а також соціальної інтеграції вразливих верств населення.

Ключові слова: Кооператив, кооперативна модель, Іспанія, баскська модель, сільськогосподарський кооператив, кредитна кооперація, соціальна економіка, відновлення економіки України, євроінтеграція.

Науковий керівник – Гончаренко В.В., доктор економічних наук, професор, професор кафедри міжнародних економічних відносин та логістики, Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна (Харків, Україна)

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