

Public Policy on Cooperatives: A Qualitative Analysis of Türkiye's Strategy and Action Plans

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Abstract: **Background:** In recent years, the social and solidarity economy (SSE) has emerged as a central framework on inclusive and sustainable development. The recent studies illustrate their institutionalisation in different regions, contributions to sustainability, challenges for transformative potentials, and comparison of public policies.

Research objectives: The first objective was to situate Türkiye and its public policy on cooperatives within the global outlook. Another aim was to track the continuity and change in this public policy.

Research design and methods: This study adopted a qualitative approach and applied a thematic analysis. Two documents used in this research, namely the Turkish Cooperatives Strategy and Action Plan (2012–2016) and Türkiye Cooperative Strategy and Action Plan (2025–2029), stand as the most significant policy papers about cooperatives.

Results: The thematic analysis compares the contents, strategic objectives, actions, governance frameworks, similar themes, and paradigm shifts, as well as strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusions: The study shows that Türkiye tends to favour top-down, market-oriented social enterprises over grassroots and transformative organisations.

Keywords: cooperative, public policy, Türkiye, sustainability

JEL Codes: P13, J54, Z18

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Introduction

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) has emerged as a central framework in both scholarly and policy debates about inclusive and sustainable development in recent years. The literature defines the concept of SSE as an umbrella term encompassing a diverse set of organisations and enterprises, including cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, associations, community organisations, and social enterprises, that prioritise social and environmental objectives alongside economic viability. In addition to a more balanced view of missions, SSE organisations typically follow democratic and participatory governance models, reinvest surpluses into communities, and operate based on equity, solidarity, and collective well-being. With the attained characteristics, these organisations are thought of inherently different and perhaps alternative to the neoliberal ideals of profit maximisation, competition and market-dictated logic.

In the last decade, the global conditions have changed significantly. The economic crisis, pandemic, regional wars, political polarisation and huge migration movements have shaken the hitherto world order without offering a new one. This has added to the existing uncertainties and risks. This pessimistic depiction of the current global situation also includes possible exit roads, which eventually led to a rising interest in SSE organisations and their potential.

The recent studies on SSEs illustrate their institutionalisation in different regions, contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the challenges regarding their sustainability and transformative potential. Moreover, some studies compare and contrast SSE policies and experiences in different countries. Below, we present a brief literature review. Next, we explain Türkiye's SSE environment with its historical development and contemporary conditions. Cooperatives have always had a central importance with their economic powers and social impacts in modern Türkiye's SSE system. To understand the continuity and change in official perspective since 2010s, we compare two cooperative strategy documents of Turkish state, one from 2012–2016 and the other for 2025–2029. The research part introduces these materials in detail and the analytical methods. In the last part, we basically try to answer the question of where Türkiye is standing within the global developments in the SSE sector and how we may understand this position.

Literature Review

The best way to understand SSE is as a 'third sector' that sits alongside the public sector and private for-profit sector, but combines aspects of both. Encyclopedia of the Social and Solidarity Economy (2023) defines them as organisational forms including cooperatives, community organisations, mutual benefit societies, and associations that aim to generate social value and address community needs rather than maximising profits. The SSE also draws on deep historical roots, as cooperatives and associations have long served as mechanisms for collective provision, mutual aid, and solidarity in response to social risks.

The United Nations' Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have given a new momentum to the global social economy sector. The UN General Assembly resolution Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) highlights the role of cooperatives and other SSE entities in achieving poverty eradication, reducing inequalities, and addressing climate change. The SSE organisations are thought to play significant roles in aligning with multiple SDGs simultaneously, namely SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Hence, the current atmosphere opens new windows for the development of the sector.

Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono (2020) explain three different ways of justification of the SSE. Firstly, SSE responds to market failures, such as unmet needs in health care, social protection, or environmental management. Secondly, it addresses public sector limitations, where states are unable to provide adequate or inclusive services. Thirdly, and more recently, it has been argued that SSE has the capacity for systemic transformation, i.e., re-embedding economies in social and ecological values. As for this third description of transformative change, European policy discourses now position SSE as a key driver of sustainable and inclusive development, emphasising its potential to reshape production and consumption systems, labour relations, and community governance, rather than just being a marginal and/or corrective actor.

Utting (2017) further develops the conceptualisation of SSE as a framework that reasserts social control over the economy. He argues that SSE provides alternatives to neoliberal globalisation by embedding ethics, equity, and solidarity into economic activities. Importantly, he stresses that SSE is not just about organisations but about broader social movements and policy environments that enable collective action. SSE contributes to the SDGs not only through material outcomes such as job creation and environmental protection but also through democratic participation and empowerment. SSE enables marginalised groups to exercise agency, build social capital, and participate in shaping their communities (Utting, 2017).

Another study belongs to Lee (2020) who shows the localisation of SDGs in South Korea by Social and Solidarity Economy Organisations and Enterprises (SSEOs) through activities in urban agriculture and circular economy sectors. Urban agriculture projects not only improve food security and nutrition but also foster social inclusion by involving disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, unemployed, and people with disabilities. Urban farming reduces food transportation distances, thereby lowering carbon emissions, and contributes to sustainable cities. Similarly, recycling and upcycling initiatives led by SSE entities promote responsible consumption and production while creating employment opportunities for vulnerable groups. To achieve these multiple aims, Lee emphasises the importance of bridging top-down policy frameworks and bottom-up community initiatives.

We may better understand the Korean experience described by Lee within a diverse perspective of SSE policy experiences worldwide. Utting (2017) conducted a comparative analysis of seven countries for ILO. The analysis in this significant report includes Brazil, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, the Philippines, South Africa, the Republic of Korea, and Italy to identify how governments have promoted SSE. These cases illustrate different historical trajectories, institutional arrangements, and policy instruments. A brief summary of these policy lines helped us situate Türkiye in the global picture.

Brazil: Scholars often cite Brazil as a leading case due to the proactive role of the state under the Workers' Party governments. In 2003, the government created the National Secretariat for Solidarity Economy (SENAES) within the Ministry of Labor and Employment. Through this institution and the Brazilian Solidarity Economy Forum (FBES), SSE became a recognised component of national development planning.

Policies such as preferential procurement from family farms, support for waste picker cooperatives, and social inclusion programs (e.g., Bolsa Verde, Brazil Without Poverty) linked SSE to poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and food security. However, Utting (2017) also noted that political changes after 2016 weakened institutional support for SSE, exposing its vulnerability to shifts in government ideology and budgetary priorities.

Costa Rica: Costa Rica represents another strong case, with long-standing institutional support for cooperatives, solidarista associations of workers, community development associations, and water and sanitation associations. Key legal frameworks from the 1960s and 1970s established permanent funding mechanisms for SSE, such as earmarking portions of cooperative profits and state bank revenues. The Popular and Communal Development Bank (BPDC) became a major financial institution supporting SSE.

While Costa Rica's legal and institutional framework is robust, it also highlights divisions within the cooperative movement and between SSE actors, which sometimes limit their collective influence. Nevertheless, Costa Rica demonstrates how legal mechanisms can institutionalise SSE sustainability over decades.

Nicaragua: In Nicaragua, SSE expanded rapidly during the Sandinista revolution of the 1980s but declined under neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. Following the Sandinistas' return to power in 2006, programs such as Zero Hunger for rural women's empowerment and Zero Usury for urban microfinance revitalised SSE. However, centralisation within the Ministry for Family, Community, Cooperative and Associative Economy (MEFCCA) created inefficiencies, limited participation, and weakened independent SSE advocacy. Nicaragua illustrates both the potential and risks of state-driven SSE, where political centralisation can compromise grass-roots autonomy.

The Philippines: NGOs, faith-based organisations, people's organisations, and cooperatives shape the Philippine SSE sector. Legal reforms in 1990 and 2008 modernised cooperative legislation and expanded membership dramatically. The growing social enterprise sector has also gained recognition. However, Utting noted tensions between transformative SSE models and more market-oriented 'social enterprises' that resemble corporate social responsibility rather than solidarity-based initiatives.

South Africa: In South Africa, SSE was linked to post-apartheid reconstruction and poverty alleviation strategies. Government rhetoric supported cooperatives and community organisations, but implementation was uneven. Structural inequalities, limited state capacity, and dominance of large corporations constrained SSE's transformative potential.

Republic of Korea: South Korea has witnessed rapid growth of certified social enterprises since the 2000s, supported by legal frameworks and subsidies. However, as Lee (2020) and Utting (2017) both note, the top-down nature of Korean SSE has raised concerns about autonomy and sustainability. While state support created opportunities for expansion, reliance on government certification and funding risks narrowed the diversity of SSE initiatives.

Italy: Italy represents one of the most mature SSE systems in Europe, with extensive legislation recognising social cooperatives and integrating them into welfare and labour market policies. SSE has been scaled significantly, but regional disparities persist. Italy demonstrates how to mainstream SSE into national social policy.

The cases demonstrate that while SSE has achieved significant recognition, the institutionalisation paths vary widely depending on political regimes, civil society mobilisation, and state capacity. In addition to these countries, Chaves-Avila and Gallego-Bono (2020) explain the situation in Europe. They argue that Europe has entered a new phase of transformative public policies for the social and solidarity economy (TPSSEs). Unlike earlier policies that provided incremental support through subsidies or tax benefits, TPSSEs seek systemic change.

Europe: Key characteristics of TPSSEs include a transformative orientation, public-community partnerships, mainstreaming, and innovative policy instruments such as technical support ecosystems, social clauses in public procurement, and cooperative clusters. Examples include France's accreditation system for solidarity enterprises of social utility, Poland's State Committee for Social Economy Development, Bulgaria's Social Economy Action Plan, and Spain's Social Economy Law (2011). In Spain, regional governments such as Valencia, Madrid, and Barcelona developed comprehensive SSE strategies after 2015, aligning them with broader socio-economic transformation agendas.

The different policies implemented in recent years show how authorities increasingly see SSE as a new field of public policy with systemic potential. However, the literature also identifies several recurring challenges for SSE. The first challenge is thought of as state capacity. Many countries lack institutional strength, resources, or technical expertise to implement SSE policies effectively. The second is a lack of policy coherence as conflicts between macro-

economic policies like trade liberalisation and austerity and SSE promotion frequently reduce effectiveness (Utting, 2017). The third challenge regards participation. It is generally assumed that genuine co-construction of policy requires empowering SSE actors, but in many contexts, participation remains limited or symbolic (Chaves-Avila & Gallego-Bono, 2020). Sustainability of the SSE institutions constitutes another problem since they are often vulnerable to political change, as seen in Brazil and Nicaragua. Finally, we may also see a conceptual tension, especially between transformative SSE models and more market-oriented 'social enterprise' frameworks, particularly in the Philippines and South Korea (Utting, 2017; Lee, 2020).

All in all, the recent studies above demonstrate that SSE has evolved from a marginal concept to a recognised pillar of sustainable development. They show that SSE embodies both practical achievements, namely job creation, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and normative aspirations of democracy, solidarity, and sustainability. The main challenges arise from the conceptual ambiguity of SSE, state-led vs. bottom-up tensions, institutionalisation problems, policy coherence and contradictions, and transformative SSE vs. market-oriented social enterprises. Moreover, the impact of digitalisation, measurement and evaluation, and country- and region-based differences still require further research.

In this article, one of our main goals is to situate Türkiye within this global outlook. To give a partial but comprehensive answer to this question, we first briefly explain historical development and current conditions of SSE entities in Türkiye. Then, we zoom in on cooperatives, especially on the state's cooperative strategy and action plans. The qualitative comparison of the plans will show the continuities and changes in public policy discourse in Türkiye.

Historical Development of Cooperatives in Türkiye

Türkiye has had a historically developed SSE sector. The SSE type organisations include associations, foundations, mutual organisations, cooperatives, and, more recently, social enterprises (OECD, 2023). In Türkiye, cooperatives, foundations, and associations constitute 'institutional' SSE, and have their own legislation and legal forms. The different characteristics of the foundations and associations are rooted in the Ottoman Empire legacy, and still have their impact.¹ In recent years, a novel form of SSE entity has also emerged, namely social enterprises. However, a definitive legal status for these entities has not been established yet, which leaves a grey area in the efforts of making a full picture of Turkish SSE sector. Still, it is important to gather existing knowledge from different data sources.

Table 1 shows available statistical data about cooperatives, foundations, and associations. As the table shows, in Türkiye, the total number of members organised in different institutions of SSE slightly exceeds 13.5 million individuals. In other words, roughly one out of every six people belongs to an SSE institution. Among the three types of organisations, associations have the most members, and cooperatives come second. Although there is no consistent and reliable data on the economic contributions of each SSE institution type, cooperatives consti-

¹ Associations and foundations have categorically a different place in Türkiye. This difference comes from complex structure of Ottoman Empire governance regime and its legacy. Like other SSE entities, their main aim is not profit making and their economic activities have a different logic. Moreover, a Directorate General under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism serves as the central administrative and supervisory body for foundations, and the associations under a Directorate General of Relations with Civil Society of the Ministry of Interior. They have still significant roles in social policy, social and cultural inclusion, civil society activities, and even for some religious communities. With these characteristics, they deserve to separately investigated, which is beyond the aims of this article. For sources about history and current situation of associations and foundations, see Barnes (1987); Mardin (1969); Buğra (2007); Yılmaz (2020); Yenice Ceylan (2025).

tute the strongest economic pillar in Türkiye. This is because of the cooperatives' direct linkages with business, which is also consistent with the observations made in numerous other countries.

Table 1. Institutional SSE in Türkiye

Organisation type	Number of organisations	Number of members
Cooperatives (a)	49,987	4,744,399
Associations (b)	102,532	7,300,000
Foundations (c)	6,295	1,466,360

Sources: (a) Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2026, (b) İç İşleri Bakanlığı, 2026, (c) Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2026.

Cooperatives have a special place with their distinctive social and economic missions in modern Türkiye. The first implementation of modern cooperatives in the Ottoman Empire began with the 'Country Fund' (*Memleket Sandıkları*) in 1863, established by Midhat Pasha, a famous moderniser statesman, and they acted as agricultural credit cooperatives. Despite these early attempts, major developments came after the foundation of modern Turkish Republic in 1923 (Mülayim, 1992).

Between 1920 and 1938, cooperatives legislation changed under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. The most important novelty in the early Republican period was the enactment of Agricultural Sale Cooperatives and Unions Law of No. 2834 and Agricultural Credit Cooperatives Law of No. 2836 in 1935. Atatürk himself became the founder of an agricultural credit cooperative founded in Silifke, a small town of Mersin. Hence, the founders of the Republic supported cooperative organisations and made efforts for their foundation, organisation, and development, especially in agriculture and villages (Mülayim, 1992).

This momentum was kept in the 1950s when a lot of powerful agricultural cooperatives were established in several significant crops such as sugar beet, olive, rose, and grape. The 1950s also witnessed new cooperative types like craftsman's cooperatives and insurance cooperatives (Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2025b). After those times, one of the most important developments was the inclusion of a provision on cooperatives in the new constitution of Türkiye. Article 51 of the 1961 Constitution includes the provision that the 'government shall take all the measures to improve the cooperatives.' Such an involvement has made the state more active and responsible for the advancement of cooperatives. The authorities further advanced this process with the enactment of Cooperatives Law No. 1163 in 1969, which brought a unity to various cooperatives legislations.

After the enactment of the new cooperative law, several new cooperatives established along with the earlier agricultural cooperatives, in industries such as transportation, consumption, credit, village development, and pharmacy in the 1970s (Mülayim, 1992; Kocabaş, 2010). The proliferation of new type of cooperatives continued in the 1980s and 1990s with an expansion to housing cooperatives. The establishment of National Cooperatives Union of Türkiye in 1991 was one of the most significant developments before the 2000s. (Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2025b). After the millennium, 'new generation' cooperatives have emerged, including community cooperatives, multi-stakeholder cooperatives, environmental cooperatives, social cooperatives, women's cooperatives, and food cooperatives (Nizam, 2021).

In the last decade, Türkiye has witnessed a new wave of cooperatives in rural areas, especially as a result of projects supported by international development institutions. For example, the World Food and Agriculture Organisation provided support to several women's cooperatives in various provinces of Türkiye for capacity building, technical, and administrative training. (FAO, 2023). This new wave was also about the huge number of refugees hosted by Türkiye in the last decade, and developing better integration conditions for these groups. Köne et al. (2023) examined these new cooperatives depending on rich qualitative interviews conducted in several Anatolian cities. Their study shows that there are numerous obstacles to sustainable development, such as social capital and continuity problems, lack of representation in management, production and marketing, a failure to reflect a genuine local energy, and the burdens of complex legislation, despite some positive outcomes such as women's empowerment, job creation, and the social cohesion of refugees.

From *Memleket Sandıkları* in the nineteenth century to modern agricultural, housing, and service cooperatives, cooperatives have played a dual role as economic enterprises and community institutions in modern Turkish history. Today, there are 49,733 active and inactive cooperatives, 330 associations, 14 central associations, and 1 Turkish National Cooperative Union in Türkiye, and 4,625,548 members registered to the Cooperative Information System (*Kooperatif Bilgi Sistemi – KOOPBİS*). Due to the complex character of cooperative legislation in Türkiye, three different ministries are dealing with different types of cooperatives. In total, there are 46 types, 36 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade, 5 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and 5 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change (Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2025a). Their distinctive place in Turkish social economic structure makes the research on public policy significant. We aimed to compare two strategy documents of Türkiye for tracking continuities and changes in the whole ecosystem. We will now present our original research and findings.

Research Method and Material

We adopted a qualitative approach for understanding the continuities and changes in the official standpoints about cooperatives in Türkiye. Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the data collection and analysis. Ethnography, interviews, focus groups, discourses, and documents constitute main data sources for qualitative research. Documents are ready-to-use and 'out there' waiting to be assembled and analysed for investigation purposes. While selecting and analysing the documents, the researchers have to check four criteria for assessing the quality: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Bryman, 2012).

The two documents we used were the most significant policy papers of Turkish state regarding cooperatives. We purposively selected these two for tracking the official discourse. Hence, we adopted purposive sampling. The documents meet the four criteria Bryman (2012) suggests to check: they are authentic by having an unquestionable origin, credible and representative by being officially launched with the highest authority in policy-making, and have a clear and understandable meaning. Hence, we could use them as reliable and valid data sources.

We applied a thematic analysis to compare the documents. A theme refers to a category that the researcher identifies within the data, relates to the research focus, and uses to develop a theoretical understanding that contributes to the relevant literature. While identifying the

themes, repetitions, transitions, similarities, and differences, the researcher looks for theory-related concepts (Bryman, 2012). We adopted a thematic analysis by focusing on frequencies, similarities and differences for comparing two plans. MAXQDA software supported the analysis. Table 2 shows the overview of codes with their frequencies and the distribution of themes in the documents. The themes emerged as codes, including global alignment, professionalisation, public image, financing, legal framework, strategic and general objectives, digitalisation, mission and vision, and finally actions to be taken for an effective cooperative system.

Table 2. Thematic Coding Overview of Strategic Documents

Code No.	Codes	2012–2016 Plan	2025–2029 Plan	Total
1	Digitalization	0	2	2
2	Global Alignment	1	2	3
3	Image	1	1	2
4	Professionalization	2	1	3
5	Financing	3	2	5
6	Legal Framework	2	2	4
7	Actions	36	23	59
8	Strategic Objective	7	3	10
9	General Objective	1	0	1
10	Vision	1	1	2
	Total	54	37	91

Source: own elaboration.

The comparison of two plans included a methodological challenge of time-lags. While the 2025 plan is still ongoing and includes future projections, the 2012 plan's discourse has already passed, meaning its promises have been realised to some degree. To overcome this barrier, a methodological triangulation was necessary for a reality check for the official standpoints. We evaluated the decade between two plans through critical lenses below depending on both recent research and the relevant chapters of the 2025 plan.

The Turkish Cooperatives Strategy and Action Plan (2012–2016) and Türkiye Cooperative Strategy and Action Plan (2025–2029) represent two distinct yet continuous phases in the Turkish government's approach to the cooperative sector. We compared these two policy documents in terms of their contents, strategic objectives, actions, governance frameworks, similar themes and paradigm shifts. We also compared the documents with their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the article offers a critical evaluation of continuities and changes in the official perspective towards cooperative sector in the last decade. Now, we would like to represent the findings and the study results in a discussion with relevant literature.

Results and Discussion

Turkish Cooperatives Strategy and Action Plan (2012–2016)

The 2012–2016 plan is a 76-pages-long document with six chapters. After the Introduction, the second chapter outlines the vision and general aims, the third chapter explains coopera-

tives in the world and Turkey. The fourth chapter conducts a SWOT analysis and identifies the priority areas of concern, and the fifth chapter defines the strategic perspective by aims and action plans. The last chapter focuses on the implementation and evaluation teams. It gives a brief historical and legal background of the cooperative sector in Türkiye.

The necessity to prepare a strategic plan resulted from both the long-lasting problems in the sector, and the International Cooperative Year announcement of the UN for 2012. In the preparation phase, the Ministry adopted a participatory perspective and organised several meetings for sector representatives, including 47 institutions and 104 participants.

The 2012–2016 Plan explains the global cooperative sector, drawing on ICA reports, as well as the Turkish situation. As of that year, there were 84,232 cooperatives in 26 different types, the total number of members of these cooperatives was 8,109,225, and the activities of this huge sector were under the authority of three different ministries. The most crowded type was housing cooperatives, followed by beet planters, agricultural credit, and agricultural development cooperatives.

Next, the Plan presents a SWOT analysis of the sector, identifying eight strengths, twenty-two weaknesses, six opportunities, and six threats. Based on the analysis, seven different ‘key issues,’ are identified namely problems faced in terms of providing service to the public and establishing an atmosphere convenient for cooperatives; inadequacies in the training, awareness raising, and research activities; problems of organisation and cooperation among the cooperatives; lack of capital and problem in access to finance; problem of audit and image; lack of institutional and professional management; problems stemming from the legislation and the implementation.

The 2012–2016 Plan ends with an action plan that specifies seven strategic targets and thirty-six activities, responsible organisations, duration, performance indicators, and an explanation. Those indicators include legal change, establishment of e-cooperative database, training programs, public awareness campaigns, support for new cooperative types, increase in international fund access, simplification of bureaucratic procedures, and managerial capacity development. Finally, the documents define the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms for reaching the aims.

The Developments Between Two Plans

The Ministry of Commerce has coordinated several projects in line with the 2012–2016 Plan until the launch of the new plan. The most significant of these projects were Cooperative Information System Project (KOOPBİS) and Cooperative Support Program (KOOPDES). Consequently, the state attempted to simplify the complex cooperative system of Türkiye by liquidating of almost 35,000 inactive cooperatives, encouraging new cooperatives with a social aim of especially for inclusion and gender equality, giving cooperative training to both cooperative members and new establishers, and integrating cooperative consciousness into curriculum in both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Türkiye has transformed its political regime from parliamentary system into a presidential one in July 2018. The regulatory framework and official organisation of the cooperative system have also changed as a result of this systemic change. This period was also shaken by the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and a huge refugee migration to Türkiye due to regional wars in neighbouring countries. In the second half of the decade between two cooperative plans, the authorities revised the Cooperative Law No. 1163 to make training, external audit, and KOOPBİS usage compulsory. Moreover, KOOPDES has also continued, especially for women cooperatives.

The revival of cooperatives in Turkish social and economic life has also led to new research from different perspectives. The diverse themes include renewal of organisational dynamics (Şahin, 2020; Nizam, 2021), the transformation of agricultural sale cooperatives (Ergün, 2021; Dodurka, 2023), women cooperatives (Şahankaya Adar et al., 2023; Kurtege Sefer, 2024), social capital (Yavaşoğlu & Özelçi Eceral, 2023), social policy (Çiçek, 2023), digital transformation (Tutkunca & Haydar, 2022), regulatory changes' impacts (Dal, 2025), and employment and integration impacts (Köne et al., 2023). These recent works on the cooperative ecosystem show not only the success in the projected period but also the discrepancies between the official aims and their realisation. On the one hand, they underline that the progress made through financial and technological support cannot be ignored, but on the other hand, there are serious problems and inefficiencies in establishing and sustaining new cooperatives, complexities because of audit and tax systems, and difficulties in balancing social aims and economic priorities. Keeping these vivid discussions in mind, we can now turn to the detailed reading of the new plan.

Türkiye Cooperative Strategy and Action Plan (2025–2029)

The 2025–2029 Plan is an 89-page-long document with two broad chapters. The first chapter explains the work done under the 2012–2016 Plan and after 2017. This part ends with a SWOT analysis resembling to the earlier plan. The second chapter discusses two strategic objectives and six targets under these objectives.

In the Introduction, the plan explains the preparation process. It was started by the later-abolished Directorate General of Cooperatives in 2017 with a meeting, a training program, and a survey about the public awareness on the issue. Consequently, a draft was written and launched in a meeting with all relevant institutions and organisations in November 2018. However, the state abolished Directorate General of Cooperatives in January 2019 with a presidential decree, and work on creating a strategy document continued within the newly established Directorate General of Craftsmen, Artisans, and Cooperatives. After this major administrative change and as a result of the pandemic, the plan preparations have slowed down. The UN declaration of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives and the 12th Development Plan for 2024–2028 have triggered the process once more. The plan was renewed through consultation meetings and workshops with stakeholders, and launched in September 2025 by the president Erdoğan.

The plan continues by the explanation of basis aligned with the higher-level policy documents, namely the Constitution, Twelfth Development Plan (2024–2028), Medium-Term Program (2024–2026), 2025 Presidential Annual Program, Ministry of Trade Strategic Plan (2024–2028), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Strategic Plan (2024–2028), Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change Strategic Plan (2024–2028), Green Deal Action Plan, 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The document presents the current situation and SWOT analysis after the description of previous works. It identifies 14 strengths, 15 weaknesses, 11 opportunities, and 6 threats. It matrixes them with the 2 strategic objectives and 6 targets. Then, in tables, it presents 23 actions to reach these goals, the responsible institution, implementation schedule, and performance indicator. The Ministry of Trade's Directorate General for Craftsmen and Cooperatives coordinate the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation system of the plan.

Now, we will present comparatively a more detailed qualitative analysis of the two plans.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of the meaningful words of the recent plan. As expected, the central concept is cooperative(s). The smaller themes also show similarities to the previous plan, particularly in areas such as training, development, legislation, and finance. A closer look at this cloud also shows new themes have been covered and frequently used. These include, themes such as women, sustainable, green, data, information, awareness. This visual comparison of the reports by word frequencies hints the continuous and changing topics. We conducted a thematic analysis to gain deeper insight into the official perspective on the cooperative system in Türkiye from the early 2010s to the present day.

Thematic Analysis of Two Plans

Visions: Both plans have a similar vision statement emphasising sustainability. The vision states as ‘establishing a reliable, efficient, effective, and sustainable cooperative structure recognised as an economic enterprise’ in the 2012–2016 Strategy and Action Plan. The emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability remains in the 2025–2029 Strategy and Action Plan’s vision statement and includes two novelties, namely international level and the leader role of cooperatives in social and economic sustainability. The new plan aims ‘to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of cooperatives at the national and international levels, enabling cooperatives to lead sustainable social and economic activities.’

Strategic Objectives: The 2012–2016 Plan sets 7 strategic objectives and 36 actions: 1) restructuring public service delivery, 2) expanding education and research, 3) strengthening organisational capacity, 4) improving finance access, 5) reforming auditing, 6) enhancing professional management, and 7) modernising legal frameworks (Gümrük ve Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2012).

The 2025–2029 Plan condenses its strategy into two overarching goals: 1) creating an enabling environment for cooperative development and 2) developing innovative cooperative policies. The Plan defines 6 targets and 23 actions for reaching these two strategic objectives such as KOOPDES, tax incentives, cooperative entrepreneurship, social cooperatives, and cooperative years (Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2025a).

Similar Themes: The targets and actions defined in both reports focus on simplification of legal and regulatory basis, strengthening financial structures, facilitating capital access, increasing public awareness, and training human capital and institutional capacity.

Legal Framework: The 2012–2016 Plan prioritised amendments to the Cooperative Law (No. 1163) and related legislation. The 2025–2029 expands this aspect to include a dedicated social cooperatives law, renewable energy and recycling regulations, and cooperative procurement priorities.

Financing: The 2012–2016 Plan suggested mechanisms such as credit guarantee funds, equity strengthening, and leveraging EU funds. The 2025–2029 operationalises these with KOOPDES reform, cooperative-specific guarantee schemes, and participation finance cooperatives.

Professionalisation: Both plans highlight training and governance. The 2012–2016 Plan introduced certification requirements and education programs, while the 2025–2029 builds on this with digital registration, mandatory external audits, and management training, alongside a specific focus on women’s cooperatives.

Awareness and Image: The 2012–2016 Plan proposed reports and integration into curricula. The 2025 adopts public visibility measures such as cooperative fairs, national contests, documentaries, and cooperative year commemorations.

Differences and Emerging Themes: Despite these similarities, there are important differences, too. These changes include discursive changes and emerging themes in their primary focus, global alignment, digital strategy, policy ambition, and governance.

Table 3. Thematic Differences Between Two Plans

Themes	2012–2016 Plan	2025–2029 Plan
Primary focus	Focus on renewing basic legislative and institutional capacity; establishing a cooperative policy.	Focus on professionalisation, aligning with global Sustainable Development Goals, and promoting cooperative entrepreneurship.
Global alignment	Limited, focused on the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives as a catalyst.	Central, explicitly linking the sector’s role to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the European Green Deal.
Digital strategy	Aimed to establish a basic ‘e-cooperative’ database for monitoring and auditing.	Focuses on sophisticated information systems (KOOPBİS) for reliable, international-standard data classification and governance.
Policy ambition	Addressing a ‘lack of policy’ and establishing cooperatives as a ‘successful initiative model.’	Aiming for cooperatives to ‘lead’ sustainable development and achieve heightened effectiveness and efficiency.
Governance	Strongly state-centric, emphasis on the central oversight of the Ministry of Customs and Trade.	Multi-actor governance, involving ministries, development agencies, municipalities, KOSGEB, İŞKUR, and civil society.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3 presents the overview of thematic analysis of two plans with a focus on differences. There are five main themes in which the plans diverge. The first plan focused on simplification of laws and increasing institutional capacity, while the recent plan focuses on sustainability and empowering human resources in the cooperative system. The plans also differ in their relation with international ecosystem. The earlier one related to the international agenda mostly through the Cooperative Year of 2012. The report includes comparisons employing ICA databases. The 2025–2029 Plan aligns with the global agenda through constructing direct linkages between the formulated policies and the SDGs and the European Green Deal. Thirdly, the usage of digital technologies to modernise the cooperative system constitutes a common theme for both plans. However, the earlier plan aimed at an internet-based system but the recent one focuses on moving to the next phase with the utilisation of new technologies.

The fourth difference between the two plans concerns policy orientation. The 2012–2016 Strategy and Action Plan document explained problems in detail and identified a ‘lack of policy.’ On the other hand, the 2025–2029 Plan assigns a ‘leader’ role to cooperatives in development. In that sense, the recent one adopts a proactive vision for the whole ecosystem. Last but not least, a state-centric mentality was clearly visible in the earlier plan, with specific roles given to the Ministry of Customs and Trade. However, the recent plan addresses more participatory governance mechanisms with an awareness of multi-stakeholders.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Two Plans: The last analysis aimed to compare the plans with regard to their strengths and weaknesses. Table 4 presents three main points for each item.

Table 4. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Two Plans

Strengths of the 2012–2016 Plan	Strengths of the 2025–2029 Plan
First structured, comprehensive vision document.	Broader scope integrating climate, digital, and social dimensions.
Introduced systemic reforms (auditing, governance, finance).	Institutionalisation of financing mechanisms (KOOPDES reform).
Grounded in empirical data and international benchmarking.	Stronger emphasis on cooperative image and legitimacy.
Weaknesses of the 2012–2016 Plan	Weaknesses of the 2025–2029 Plan
Limited treatment of sustainability, digitalisation, or social cooperatives.	Unclear distribution of authority and duties among different institutions as a barrier to an effective coordination.
Implementation gaps, many reforms remained aspirational.	Strong EU-centric framing may challenge traditional cooperatives less aligned with green transition.
Reliance on ministerial centralisation.	Risk of fragmentation if coordination among multiple actors fails.

Source: own elaboration.

The powerful aspects of the earlier plan are the structure, reform perspective, and international benchmarking but it has some drawbacks with regard to the implementation and organisational phases. The recent plan has a more comprehensive content with contemporary global agenda of climate change, sustainable development, and digitalisation. However, institutionalisation and coordination among different stakeholders remain blurred.

Conclusion

Recent studies show the evolution of SSE from a relatively insignificant concept to an integral pillar of sustainable development. SSE organisations embody not only the practical achievements of job creation, poverty alleviation, and environmental protection, but also the normative aspirations of democracy, solidarity, and sustainability. The main challenge was to ensure that SSE policies are coherent, participatory, and resilient enough to withstand political and economic shifts. Moreover, the literature discusses tensions arising from state-led vs. bottom-up approaches, institutionalisation problems, policy coherence and contradictions, and transformative SSE vs. market-oriented social enterprises.

Türkiye has always had a vivid social economy environment with different types of organisations since the modernisation efforts of the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, cooperatives gained momentum, especially after the 1960s. Within this historical development, the last decade witnessed another rise in cooperative establishment. Today, there are 49,733 active and inactive cooperatives, 330 associations, 14 central associations, and 1 Turkish National Cooperative Union in Türkiye, and 4,625,548 members registered to the Cooperative Information System. This rise includes examples of not only organic organisations with more participatory and bottom-up initiatives, but also state-led cooperatives as a solution to social integration problems. The majority of these new organisations aim to become a market-oriented social enterprise rather than a transformative potential. The hybrid outlook of the current situation is open to different trajectories of development in the following years, and hence follow-up and further research will contribute to overall understanding.

In the last decade, Türkiye has undergone important socio-economic changes. In the early 2010s, the population of the country was around 70 million, and GDP per capita around

11,000 USD. Today, 86 million people are living in the country with a growing economy. According to OECD Economic Surveys (2025), Türkiye has been one of the fastest-growing economies in the OECD over the past decade. However, the income gap with OECD countries remains large and structural challenges persist. Along with these, the political regime has transformed from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential governmental system in the last decade. Both global and national developments have resulted in huge migration movements in and out of the country (İncekara & Oktar, 2023; Altınörs & Akçay, 2022; Şahin, 2019; Ünsal & Sertkaya Doğan, 2024). Any research comparing the Türkiye of early 2010s' and today should address these fundamental transformations in economic, social, and political structure. Hence, in the background, we also hinted to these shifts and their impact on the whole cooperative environment.

To follow the track of the official viewpoints, we compared two cooperative strategies and action plans of Türkiye, namely the 2012–2016 Plan and the 2025–2029 Plan. The comparison illustrates a shift in Turkey's cooperative policy paradigm: The 2012–2016 Plan focused on modernisation, institutional reform, and international alignment, while the 2025–2029 one extends this foundation, reframing cooperatives as agents of sustainability, social innovation, and digital transformation. We detected four similar themes as simplification of legislations, necessity for professionalisation, efforts for increasing awareness and public image of cooperatives, and empowering the financial capacity. On the other hand, there are content differences about their primary focus, global alignment, digital strategy, policy ambition, and governance. The strengths and weaknesses of the plans also show that vagueness and uncertainties about implementation, monitoring, and institutionalisation of the planned goals occur in the recent plan, even though noteworthy progress has been made in the last decade.

The content comparison of the two plans also shows that Türkiye tends to favour top-down and market-oriented social enterprise over grassroots and transformative organisations. In this respect, it resembles less the transformative SSE models in Europe and the market-oriented 'social enterprise' frameworks like those in the Philippines and South Korea. Moreover, the organisational and financial capacity of these new cooperatives poses another question for their sustainability in the long term. Lack of necessary monetary, administrative, and human resources will possibly harm their viability and efficiency. Sustainability of the institutions is also affected since they are often vulnerable to political change, as seen in Brazil and Nicaragua. Another important characteristic of the Turkish SSE environment is the complexity of its legal and statistical structure. Especially, it seems that digitalisation and simplification of complexities in the laws will take a central place in the following years.

We identified several important implications for public policy and future research. The capacity building training programs will have significant role in the development of new cooperatives. After the early phases of establishment, organisational and financial resilience of these new units will require different competencies and abilities. Another implication regards equipping human capital with digital opportunities, sustainability priorities, and community-building support. Tracking and research on new types of cooperative experiences also constitutes a good future direction.

This study has its own limitations. First of all, it concentrated on cooperatives. Social and solidarity economy has a wider content with associations, foundations, and other social enterprises. One may grasp a full picture by taking all of them into account. Moreover, the study relied primarily on strategic documents and we considered factors influencing the actual implemen-

tation of the plans only in the context of the overall evaluation. Future research could also focus on international comparisons, particularly with countries sharing similar characteristics.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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