

An approach to the concept of Agricultural Associativity in the context of rural development

Aproximación al concepto de Asociatividad Agropecuaria como desarrollo rural

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Abstract

The associative approach is recognized as a tool for rural development, as well as a socio-business strategy to enhance human capabilities, connect markets, and create economies of scale for small and medium rural producers, leading to increased competitiveness in the agricultural sector. The aim of this article is to analyze the origin and evolution of the concept of associativity and the processes it involves. A qualitative, descriptive methodology was employed through a structured literature review using a documentary design, seeking to interpret the ideas presented by other authors. The contribution of this research is academic in nature, as it explores the state of the art regarding the topic.

Keywords: Agri-businesses, social capital, cooperation, producers, rural sector.

JEL Classification: M1, O1.

Resumen

El tema asociativo es reconocido como herramienta de desarrollo rural, además como una estrategia socio-empresarial para perfeccionar las capacidades

humanas, articular los mercados y crear economías de escala para pequeños y medianos productores rurales, conducente a la competitividad del sector agropecuario. El objetivo del artículo se plantea en términos de analizar el origen y evolución del concepto de asociatividad y los procesos que en ella se presentan. Para ello, se utilizó una metodología con enfoque cualitativo de carácter descriptivo, por medio de una revisión bibliográfica estructurada con diseño documental, que busca la interpretación de las ideas expuestas por otros autores. El aporte de esta investigación es de carácter académico, en tanto que estudia el estado del arte de la temática en cuestión.

Palabras claves: Agroempresas, capital social, cooperación, productores, sector rural.

Clasificación JEL: M1, O1.

1. Introduction

Globalization creates an uncertain outlook for the population, demanding dynamism, transformation, adaptation, exchange of practices and cultures, and international access to business networks. This scenario requires interaction among countries



in social, economic, technological, political, and environmental matters. Small rural producers are not exempt from this context or from the changes it entails for agricultural development (Thorne, Chong, Salazar, & Carlos, 2015). Latin America must prepare to face the challenges of governmental, academic, business, and technological transformations, and thus calls for the pursuit of innovative paradigms that promote justice, equity, sustainability, and competitiveness (Echeverri & Ribero, 2002).

The modernization of the rural sector requires the design and implementation of processes aimed at improving the living standards of producers, in terms of education, employment, value-added production, productive reconversion, and integration into national and international markets. In this regard, Bertolini (2012) notes that agricultural ventures operate based on the association of the actors involved in the process, generating benefits such as: availability of infrastructure, technology adoption, access to inputs and financing, training, and management of information and communication.

In this sense, proposals are based on new models that integrate agricultural production units, supported by new information and communication technologies, in order to overcome individualism and backwardness in rural areas, and to redefine rural work practices to achieve high levels of profitability, competitiveness, and sustainability (Sanabria, 2022).

For this purpose, the academic, business, and governmental communities have shown interest in studying associativity, generating publications related to this topic. In Brazil, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Bolivia, Japan, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, and the United States, research and experiences have been identified that propose new trends, guidelines, and models that promote the integration of producers and the strengthening of agribusiness organizations (Serna & Rodríguez, 2016).

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and the strengthening of agribusiness organizations (Serna & Rodríguez, 2016). In this context, research is conducted on the theoretical production developed around associativity in the rural sector, aiming to answer the research question: How has the conception of rural associativity evolved in both global and national contexts? Therefore, this article documents the relationship between human beings and rural development and analyzes various theoretical frameworks from the origin and historical evolution to its impact on the formation of agribusiness networks.

In the first section, it was established that the objective of the article is exploratory-descriptive in nature, guided by the questions: What is known about agricultural associativity in rural development? What are its characteristics?

The methodology involves a structured and refined literature review, with a qualitative, descriptive approach and documentary design that seeks to collect, analyze, and interpret data from secondary sources in order to understand the studied topic, avoid researcher bias, and prioritize objectivity (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). The article is organized into four sections: first, the concept is explored through a literature review; second, the methodology is defined; third, agricultural associativity is contextualized within rural development; and finally, the conclusions are presented.

2. Literatura review

2.1 *Genesis of the concept of Associativity*

This section presents Table 1 as an evolutionary timeline of the origin and development of associativity. The outline draws on contributions from various authors (Ardila, 1965; Colombian Association of Cooperatives, 2015; Barreriro, 2014; Battisti et al., 2020; Corragio, 2012; Dávila et al., 2018; FAO, 2004; Holmes, Arango, & Pérez, 2022; Kasmir, 1999; Liendo & Martínez, 2001; Mondragon Corporation, 2015; Monje, 2011; Ottaviano et al., 2002; Ramos, 2015; Ramírez, Herrera, & Londoño, 2016; Piketty, 2021; Pineda, 2017; Serna & Rodríguez, 2015; Uribe, 1993; Uribe, 2011).

Since primitive times, associativity has been recorded as a human and social activity, a form of community interaction (Aristotle, 1873), and it arises from the need to come together in various ways to

Table 1. Historical evolution of the concept of Associativity

PERIOD	CHRONOLOGY	AUTHORS	CONTRIBUTIONS
EARLY APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF ASSOCIATIVITY	5th century B.C. ñ 3rd century A.D.	Uribe	Early manifestations of groupings among artisans and agricultural producers during the beginnings of civilization in Egypt, Athens, and Babylon.
	12th century	Uribe	In China, the first savings and credit cooperatives were created.
	16th century 1590	Colombian Association of Cooperatives (ASCOOP)	Pre-Columbian American tribes Incas, Mayas, and Aztecs organized themselves into mingas, indigenous resguardos, encomiendas, and convites as collaborative work structures.
	17th century	Monje	In response to inequality in Europe, new forms of solidarity- and equality-based business organization (work associations) emerged.
	18th century 1730 1750	Ramírez, Herrera and Londoño	In the United States, the first associative forms were created.
	(1789 ñ 1792) (1750 ñ 1850)	Serena and Rodríguez	French Revolution: Declaration of Human Rights Industrial Revolution: Scientific and technological advances Private property and capitalism
	1830	Pineda	Robert Owen Father of British socialism and pioneer of cooperativism.
	1844	Uribe Monje	Cooperativism is born in England with the Rochdale Cooperative, marking a turning point (Principles of Cooperativism).
	1873	Aristotle	First content stating that man is a social being, inclined toward cooperation and community interaction.
	1895	Ramírez, Herrera and Londoño	The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is founded. Cooperative principles.
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONCEPT IN RECENT CENTURIES	1911	Ardila	The collective experience called the Kibbutz is created as a means of protection and mutual collaboration. During the Russian Revolution, the kolkhozes were established.
	1950	Kasmir	Mondragon Cooperative Group, in Guipuzcoa (Mondragón), located in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country.
	1957 1963	Uribe	Caribbean Cooperative Confederation Organization of Cooperatives of the Americas
	1990s	Coraggio	Associativity arises in Brazil. Associative experiences take place in Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador.
	2015	Luttuada, Nogueira Urcola	Associative forms of family farming in rural development in Argentina.
	2016	Arbel-az	Associativity for the development of rural territories.
	2016	Rodríguez and Ramírez	Application of business strengthening processes to producer associations in Colombia.
	2017	FAO	Associativity among family farmers applied to the Andean Quinoa Producers Network (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, and Ecuador).
	2018	Espinoza Lastra and Gúmez L.	Theoretical construction and methodological proposal to calculate associative capacities (Ecuador).
	2018	D- vila et al	Promotion of the hybrid combination between market and non-market economies.
	2020	Battisti et al.	Foundation of the social and solidarity economy in economic production.
	2021	Picketty,	Reducing structural inequalities of economic, social, and political nature in society.
	2022	Holmes, Arango y Pérez	Community cohesion among beneficiaries and development of social capital and organization.

Source: Own elaboration.



achieve objectives and means of subsistence such as food and social coexistence that would not be attainable individually. Cooperation has developed significantly, creating different social models “since the beginning of human life, when people began to group together to protect themselves from the unknown forces of nature and from attacks by other men who, like them, were trying to survive” (Serna & Rodríguez, 2016:3).

Uribe (2011) suggests that cooperation has been useful in addressing economic problems since the earliest stages of civilization. For instance, Egyptian artisans organized themselves for trade and to preserve their benefits; in Athens and Rome, from the 5th century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D., farmers and artisans formed guilds to defend their interests and honor the dead through funeral and insurance societies; in Babylon, Undestabings were formed as associations for the production and marketing of agricultural products; in China, around the 12th century, savings and credit cooperatives were born; in Slavic and Germanic towns, agrarian and labor congregations were created; and Armenian communities formed groups for dairy processing (cheese production).

In 1590, the pre-Columbian tribes (Incas, Mayas, and Aztecs) organized themselves into mingas, indigenous resguardos, encomiendas, and convites, based on Catholic religious traditions, emphasizing collective ownership and labor in rural areas. Likewise, the organizational, social, cultural, and economic practices of the Chibcha and Muisca indigenous communities are highlighted (Colombian Association of Cooperatives, 2015; Ramírez, Herrera, & Londoño, 2016).

In this exploratory line, two key events laid the foundation for cooperative and associative philosophy: the French Revolution (1789–1792), which elevated individual interests related to “politics and society, resulting in the Declaration of Human Rights” (Serna & Rodríguez, 2016:4), and the Industrial Revolution (1750–1850), marked by scientific and technological advances, the formation of private property, and the foundations of capitalism. This new organization led to injustice and chaos in labor relations and state repression; this situation promoted the cooperation and association of workers (unionism) (Uribe, 2011). In response to this crisis, Robert Owen proposed an alternative

economic system to capitalism, based on associated labor as a means to improve the quality of life of its participants (Pineda, 2017).

From this perspective, there is a recognized need to build a just, equitable, and sustainable society that reduces deep structural economic and social inequalities, reflected in the distribution of land and income, through processes of collaboration, community ownership, and cooperative labor (Piketty, 2021).

In Latin America, agricultural associativity has strengthened in recent decades as an alternative solution to the challenges that manifest in the low standard of living of the rural population. It is therefore considered a pillar of rural development frameworks. Rural associativity is studied from two angles: a social perspective, based on cooperation, mutual aid, solidarity, and teamwork; and an economic perspective that prioritizes productive projects and the creation of successful agribusinesses (Liendo & Martínez, 2011).

In Brazil, associativity emerged at the end of the 20th century with the goal of increasing the income of the most vulnerable populations, enabling them to improve their quality of life (Coraggio, 2012). In Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia, associative experiences have developed aimed at transitioning from a capitalist economy to a social economy, serving as a catalyst for national economic and social development (Ramos, 2015).

In Colombia, Dávila et al. (2018:89) identified two schools of thought that have influenced the construction of knowledge around associativity: the Latin American and the European. In this regard, the associative economic approach was born within the cooperative movement, from which a theoretical and legal framework has developed, providing an economic, social, cultural, and ethical foundation for the emergence of new associative models, based on principles of solidarity, justice, equity, and democracy.

In summary, the social economy is expressed in solidarity through experiences supported by socio-economic movements and structures and by social capital, using a different mode of production that is collectively managed, with the goal of empowering the beneficiary community (Battisti et al., 2020; Holmes, Arango & Pérez, 2022).



2.2 Conceptualization

The concept of associativity originates in prehistoric times and is polysemic in nature. Since individuals began to form groups and promote collectivism within small nomadic tribes, it has served as a voluntary expression and a form of social engagement (Uribe, 2011).

Initially, the associative notion is approached from a socialist perspective rooted in sociology; from the beginning of human life, opposing situations emerged that required people to unite in order to survive. However, the foundations of society have been altered over time. Since ancient times, individualism has been imposed as a model of domination, and later, the feudal system laid the groundwork for the emergence of capitalism.

Nonetheless, between the 18th and 19th centuries, Engels (2009) criticized the capitalist system, labeling it a predator of the human species, concerned solely with profit and capital accumulation. This situation led to rebellion and the emancipation of the oppressed in response to social inequality, giving rise to Utopian Socialism. In this regard, Marx (2004), as a precursor of the socialist movement, offered a critique of power relations, private property, and domination traits of capitalism combined with economic liberalism, surplus value, and labor exploitation. He explained the origins of capital and its reproduction mechanisms, which involve violence, cruelty, and inequality in the distribution, appropriation, and control of economic resources, with the state's consent.

In a second phase, the concept is studied from the perspective of collectivism, which emphasizes individuals subordinated to the group in pursuit of the common good. This idea materialized in antiquity through collective struggles for subsistence and was grounded in collective ownership. However, during the feudal and slave periods, private property prevailed, which was further reinforced under capitalism. In contrast, a new collective model emerged based on wage labor, the socialization of production, and the rise of the proletariat. This situation shaped collectivism as a principle of socialism that promotes equality, non-exploitative labor, and the harmonious development of society (Rauch, 2005).

Additionally, some biblical collective experiences are recalled, such as in the early church of Jerusalem,

where people donated their possessions to help those in need (Acts 2:44-45), even though they were not obligated to offer gifts for the benefit of the collective. Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 8:12-14, Paul encourages the Corinthians to support the church in Jerusalem economically to achieve equality. Similarly, religious practices illustrate associativity through foundations and organizations focused on educational, social, spiritual, health, and financial well-being (Casado, 1999).

Villar (2017) proposes a form of collectivism in which ownership is communal, labor is collective, and profits are equitably distributed in order to eliminate the dominance of land accumulation and the exploitation of workers.

Following this line of thought, Dávila et al. (2018) assert that associativity in Latin America is guided by an ethical-moral approach, shaped by the integration of economics and ethics, as promoted by the Catholic Church in its vision of a fairer and more equitable society. This is supported by Razeto (2009) in his Economic Theory of Solidarity, based on solidarity and cooperation, and by Guerra (2002), through his Socioeconomic Proposition of Solidarity, a tool for analyzing economic experiences in Latin America. Thus, from the perspective of the Solidarity Economy, rural associativity is conceptualized as a form of collective development, organized as an enterprise with the goal of meeting the members' needs and achieving collective benefit. This materializes in producer associations formed to withstand competition, improve bargaining power, and enhance offerings.

Liendo and Martínez (2011), for their part, consider rural associativity as a means of participation through which productive units combine their capacities to face challenges derived from globalization. These challenges include connecting to national and international markets, adopting new production and information technologies, and dealing with the small size of their farms.

In this conceptual approach, Dávila et al. (2018) identified in their research an economic approach grounded in Popular Economy or Labor Economy, distinct from capital-based systems. This model recognizes workers' needs and expectations and their ways of organizing (Álvarez & Gordo, 2007; Coraggio, 2009).

In recent times, associativity has emerged as an agent of intervention in labor, social, poverty, and development-related conflicts between the state and individuals. This has led to the formation of a new cooperative order, aimed at promoting associative entities that challenge injustice, inequality, solidarity, mutual aid, and democracy in labor, social, and economic activities that shaped cultural and philosophical change (Piketty, 2021).

As a corollary of this review, it is important to note that there is no unified conceptual definition of the term associativity in the literature. Nevertheless, Bustamante (2007:9) defines it as “a form of cooperation that involves actors of different natures around collective processes, which arise from the understanding that ‘alone we cannot move forward’; of social or cultural nature, it enables the activation and channeling of dispersed and latent forces toward the achievement of a common goal.”

In the same vein, Poliak (2001) describes associativity as a strategy for collective participation, specifically related to enterprises of a particular nature (agricultural), channeling cooperative efforts to achieve common goals and facilitate problem-solving. From this perspective, grouping is proposed as a way to concentrate and increase production, reduce fixed unit costs, improve bargaining power, and optimize available resources through economies of scale. This view is supported by Ottaviano et al. (2002), who affirm that these types of organizations improve benefits for agricultural producers in areas such as: the incorporation of new technologies, human capital training, market entry and positioning, access to information, and the improvement of production processes and product quality.

The practice of associativity is characterized by the establishment of trust, relationships, and cohesion among producers; confidence in the cooperative process; the setting of common goals and objectives; and holistic management through a systems approach, which considers all key success factors for sound business direction. This includes the participation of members in financial, marketing, human talent, and production activities, as expressed by Pérez & Múnera (2007) and reaffirmed by Déniz, León, & Palazuelos (2008).

On the other hand, Francés (2008) proposes several characteristics of associativity, including the presence of a shared idea and business

project among the group, aimed at identifying an opportunity or solving a problem; a strong sense of belonging and commitment among all members; loyalty to the values, principles, and objectives of the community; and a willingness to face, as a team, the risks inherent in this type of business structure. It also involves coordinating efforts to achieve success and undertaking a solidarity-based project with common goals, shared risks, member autonomy, mutual assistance, and reciprocal commitment (SEPYME, 2011), as illustrated in Figure 1.

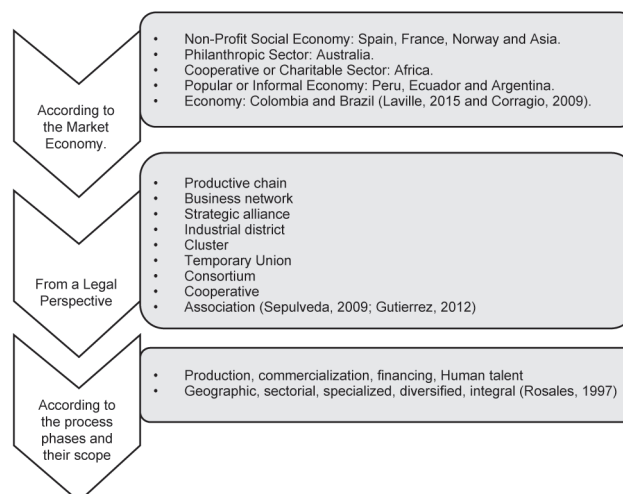
Figure 1. Characteristics of Associativity



Note: Own elaboration based on Déniz, De León, and Palazuelos (2008); Francés (2008); Pérez and Múnera (2007); SEPYME (2011).

Associative forms based on cooperation, mutual aid, collaboration, participation, and teamwork have an alternative legal designation and framework to the market economy operating in each nation, and they present different legal meanings (Dávila et al., 2018), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Classification of associative forms



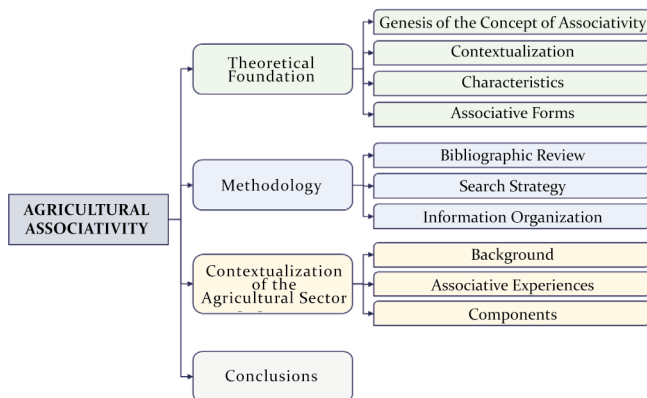
Note: Own elaboration.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research with a descriptive approach and a documentary design was carried out. This approach seeks to explore, study, and interpret secondary data to understand the topic under examination, avoiding researcher bias and ensuring objectivity (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). The review was developed in three phases: in the first stage, a bibliographic search was conducted using sources registered in scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, referring to scientific articles, theses, books, institutional papers, and conference presentations, complemented by a search using Google Scholar. Once the databases were established, the search conditions were determined according to the exploratory-descriptive objective of the review, guided by the search descriptors “agricultural associativity” and “rural development.”

In the third phase, the information was organized through a logical, sequential, and rational outline that facilitated understanding, based on the criteria of filtering, ordering, labeling, integrating, and prioritizing (Maeda, 2006), as presented in the following mind map.

Figure 3. Mind Map



Note: Own elaboration.

In the final stage, the application to the agricultural sector with a particular focus on rural development was analyzed, combined, and discussed, written in a methodical and sequential form, based on the background and subsequent ideas.

4. Contextualization in the agricultural sector

The agricultural sector worldwide faces various challenges aimed at increasing competitiveness and

productivity, a situation that requires its evolution through the implementation of innovative practices for the organization and creation of agribusinesses capable of generating employment and contributing to economic growth (Melgarejo, Vera, & Mora, 2013), which would reduce poverty, and achieve sustainability, food security, and sovereignty in countries (OECD, 2014).

In this perspective, as a result of the research, it is inferred that agricultural associativity emerges as an element contributing to rural development and the generation of policies and projects for small and medium producers who ally to face the conflicts stemming from the globalization process and originated from universal ancestral agricultural collaborative experiences (González, 2018).

Thus, the agricultural business associative ideology originated in Europe during the 19th century and materialized in various cooperative expressions: 1) Germany promoted agricultural development based on solidarity collaboration, embodied in an agricultural credit cooperative, where savings and credit operations, supply of inputs, and common capital derived from surpluses were carried out; 2) Rome promoted community exploitation of land, either agricultural or livestock; 3) Italy, France, and Switzerland in the Juna region showed traces of associative activity in the dairy sector; and 4) Slavic countries such as Serbia and Russia also developed collective experiences (Zabala, 2016). Similarly, these solidarity practices were introduced to Canada and the rural sector of the United States, building a strong movement across the region, formalizing cooperative-friendly regulations in the early 20th century (1909).

Additionally, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2001: 53) presented a report on the contribution of cooperatives to optimize the living and working conditions of agricultural producers and agroindustrial workers; likewise, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2006), Unda (2008), Ibáñez et al. (2015), Contreras, Palma & Reyes (2009), and the SAC (2010) have conducted research on agricultural associativity processes in different nations; a situation reflected in Table 2.

Based on these approaches, emphasis is placed on the interest in promoting the associative culture in the agricultural sector through processes of integrating small and medium producers, contributing to



the articulation with new markets; increasing negotiation capacity with different interest groups (suppliers of inputs and services, marketers, and consumers); formalizing labor, enhancing human and business capacities; and, in general, improving the quality of life of the rural population.

Table 2. Rural Associative Experiences Around the World

Countries	Practices
Belgium	75% of milk production and commercialization
Netherlands	85% of fruit and vegetable commercialization
Luxembourg	95% of seed and plant production
Denmark	90% of ham production
Greece	50% of animal feed and wine production
Germany	80% of milk and cereal commercialization
Italy	60% of fat and cereal production and commercialization
France	70% of cereal production and 90% of agro-industrial fruit production
Spain	Olive oil commercialization
Poland	Formation of agricultural farms and agricultural circles
Russia	Food supply through kolkhoz (collective farms)
Israel	Collective farms. Agricultural collectivization. Kibbutz
Algeria	Technical exploitation and modernization of the country
Turkey	Use of productive land and complementary services
India	Agricultural cooperatives and collective agro-industrial societies
Canada, United States and Brazil	Agricultural associativity, agricultural credit cooperatives, services, supply, commercialization, and agricultural transformation
Bolivia	Agricultural cooperatives, economic transformation of the country
Ecuador	Agricultural production and commercialization Peasant Economic Organizations (OEC)
Peru	Associativity for agricultural production with state support, aimed at increasing competitiveness for small producers. PARA project
Argentina	Agricultural service and commercialization cooperatives
Mexico	Growth, profitability, and sustainability as agricultural policy
Chile	Introduction of information technology, associative business development in commercialization
Colombia	Strategies for promoting and strengthening agro-associative enterprises as an integrative element for small and medium producers to achieve sector competitiveness

Note: Own elaboration based on: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2006); Contreras, Palma & Reyes (2009); Ibáñez et al. (2015); ILO (2001); SAC (2010); Unda (2008).

This means that associative practices will focus on the development of human beings as active members of society and their processes of fair, equitable, supportive, and sustainable growth and development. This argument is complemented by Ferrando (2015: 184), who considers that “the factors that favor the associativity of small producers are framed in teamwork, greater economic benefits, optimization of quality, access to markets, capture of financial resources, and cost reduction.”

On this ideology, Moyano (1988) considers that the particularities of the countryside demand the creation of associative forms due to the mode of production employed, characterized by a high level of individualism and dispersion, cultivation of the same products leading to oversupply and therefore low prices; therefore, peasant organization favors the possibility of solving this problem.

From this perspective, the agricultural sector, particularly in developing countries, can consolidate by implementing associativity as an integrating element for small and medium producers, who by their nature require the support of different actors to ensure their competitiveness. The national economy should be based on the rural sector, adapting to changes generated by global processes in the economic, social, political, technological, and environmental context, which demands the reorganization of production, commercial, manufacturing, and consumption processes of products and services, granting a leading role to development (Elizondo, 2015).

Following this line of analysis, associativity can be defined as a teamwork process aimed at achieving common goals established by the collective, through principles and values of trust, solidarity, commitment, participation, and leadership, which enable achieving effects that would not be possible individually in the areas of production, marketing, and management (Amezaga, Rodríguez, Núñez, & Herrera, 2013).

This thought is complemented by Villar (2017), who points out that associativity is an element that contributes to expanding the associative business capacities, structured into two groups: socio-organizational (social capital, organizational planning, and territorial integration) and business (economic, productive, technological, and market orientation), which allow strengthening collaboration networks among producers.

In agreement with what has been stated, (Ibáñez, Cabrera, & Martínez, 2015) express that associativity depends on dimensions such as: values (cooperation, reciprocity, transparency, openness, and freedom) and principles (commitment, participation, and achievement of objectives). This argument is validated by Narváez et al. (2009), who assert that the values for forming an associative organization are: transparency, reciprocity, freedom, and openness.

Moreover, the expression of associativity is related in the scientific literature to the notions of social capital, culture, teamwork, in the non-economic component, and competitiveness and economic development, in the economic component (Guerrero & Villamar, 2016) factors considered the foundation for the economic and social progress of countries, motivated by the pursuit of achieving common goals through cooperation and the integration of efforts among producers, aimed at inserting their products into national and international markets.

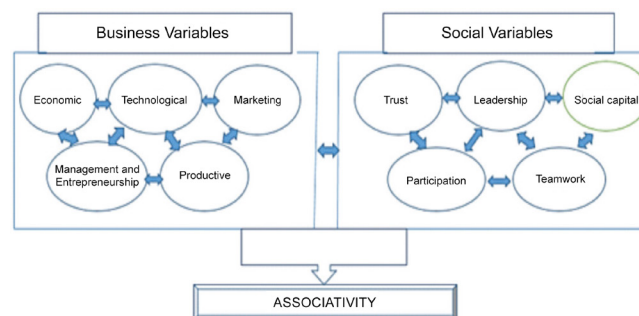
Thus, producer associations represent a collective exercise by farmers who have homogeneous production and commercialization objectives. They compete with each other but simultaneously cooperate and favor the attainment of social and economic benefits for all their members (Brasier et al., 2007).

They also constitute a key tool for obtaining price and market information, allow the absorption and exchange of knowledge, and at the same time facilitate the formation of links and social relationships with all members of the organization (Katungi et al., 2008).

We agree with Berdegúe (2000) in stating that rural associativity is related to a process of voluntary incorporation and free adhesion, where producers and companies group together to achieve collective interests related to their productive operation (marketing, technology, entrepreneurship, and business management) and social (cooperation, social capital, and trust); factors necessary to build associative processes articulated with public and private institutions that generate individual and collective benefits. This concept aligns with Vargas et al. (2019), who assert that in the rural sector, collaboration among agro-entrepreneurs combines their particular capacities to improve their benefits around markets and their economic and social progress.

Next, the variables involved in the rural associativity process are graphically presented (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Components of rural associativity



Note: Own elaboration based on Amézaga, Rodríguez, Núñez y Herrera (2013); Berdegúe (2000); Ibáñez, Cabrera, Celerina y Martínez (2015) y Villar (2017).

Associativity in the agricultural sector generates a synergistic effect by maximizing the strengths of all its participants and minimizing their weaknesses through the articulation of the links in the value chain. In other words, integration is the key to achieving profitability, competitiveness, and sustainability in rural producers by aligning their efforts to reach common goals (Mielgo, 2005).

Focusing on Colombia, associativity in the agricultural sector has been understood as an opportunity for growth, seeking to strengthen relationships among participants with common objectives and benefits in both social and economic spheres; in other words, this activity is projected as the future of agricultural development.

The Presidential Agency for Cooperation-Colombia (2016) sees it as “a key strategy for sustainable rural development,” in generating social capital and building regions, with the goal of improving the productive, commercial, and social capacity of small producers. In this regard, the country has received contributions and international cooperation practices aimed at creating, strengthening, and developing the human, economic, and environmental capacities of the most disadvantaged rural population through productive alliances, actor integration, and the improvement of production chains.

Similarly, the National Planning Department-DPN (2014) considers it a key element in creating scenarios that optimize the quality of life in rural communities, as it facilitates organization, productivity improvement, cost reduction, product

distribution in markets, achieves economies of scale, increases bargaining power, and engages producers; a definition in sync with the one provided by the Ministry of Agriculture (2018:1) aimed at “strengthening productivity, competitiveness, and sustainability to promote comprehensive social development in the territory and improve the living conditions of rural inhabitants.

An equivalent argument is made by Estrada (2016), who asserts that collective production and management stimulate the development of the productive, social, and business capabilities of the community in rural territories, complemented by the government to openly contribute to the formulation of policies expressed in territorial organization, innovation, and the acquisition of products and better income for small producers. Therefore, in the municipality of Vélez, a certification initiative for the traditional snack was launched, with the aim of obtaining the “Denomination of Origin Bocado Veleño.” This process is supported by the Swiss-Colombian intellectual property project COLIPRI (2013-2016), which is a cooperation initiative between the Colombian and Swiss governments” (p.134).

Another experience of cooperative participation that arose within the community is related to “artisanal fishing in the northern Pacific region of Chocó, contributing through a participatory and consensual process to marine planning and sustainable fishing” (Estrada, 2016, p.136). This initiative involves external actors such as the Inter-Institutional and Community Group for Artisanal Fishing (GIC-PA) and the Exclusive Zone for Artisanal Fishing (ZEPA), as governmental and academic collaborators (Estrada, 2016).

In this endeavor, it is necessary to formulate innovative associative models that respond to global economic, social, technological, and environmental transformations, going beyond a focus solely on maximizing economic profit, and instead embracing a comprehensive, sustainable, and socially responsible approach. The intention is to take advantage of the opportunities that the agricultural sector offers to small-scale producers through collaboration and integration into national and international markets.

n this line of reasoning, small producers must understand and be empowered to assume the role they play in the rural development of the country,

using the associative strategy to generate social capital as an instrument of territorial progress through community tasks and responses to social, economic, and environmental challenges particularly those related to climate change and unequal access to markets. These are further compounded by the small size of their farms, individual labor, and mutual distrust.

5. Conclusions

The scientific literature records various findings regarding the historical development of associativity, particularly in the agricultural sector, and the analysis of elements that influence rural development. However, knowledge gaps remain that have hindered the implementation and formulation of policies that would significantly impact the rural development of agricultural communities in Colombia and other Latin American countries (Holmes, Arango, and Pérez, 2022).

In order to provide useful insights to academia and individuals involved in the subject, a thorough literature review was conducted, highlighting the key aspects that should be addressed in cooperative processes of community organization (Figure 5), throughout professional training, research, knowledge creation, and work performance.

Figure 5. Word Cloud: Rural Associativity.



Note: Own elaboration.

Now then, to face the challenges posed by a globalized world, it is necessary to develop the social talent for cooperation that humans possess, as an innate condition since the earliest manifestations of community organization through family ties, clans, or tribes for managing the search for food as a survival and territorial sustenance strategy (Poveda, 2019).



Particularly in the context of the agricultural sector, small producers group together as a response to the problems caused by internal and external competition. This grouping becomes a strategy to minimize the deficiencies present in rural areas, especially among smallholders with minifundio-type lands. By combining their small-scale productions, they gain leverage in transactions with intermediaries, succeed in reducing large price fluctuations, learn and share knowledge among members, absorb technology and innovation, benefit from market opportunities, and collectively face environmental threats (Salas, 2016).

In this line of analysis, the importance of associativity is inferred as a response to the social and economic shortcomings of rural populations. It takes the form of community-based groups centered on solidarity, teamwork, mutual aid, collaboration, and trust. It also promotes socio-economic projects that foster investment initiatives to generate income for producers in a competitive, profitable, and sustainable environment (Giraldo, López & Cardona, 2020).

In this context, associativity is conceived as a broad concept applied across various scenarios. Originating in ancient times, it has evolved in line with advances in all sectors of society. In the rural sector in particular, this business model should be central to designing an agri-business prototype that connects small and medium producers with distributors, processors, and consumers, through public-private partnerships (State-Business-Academia). These partnerships are key to managing agricultural solidarity organizations, supported by information and communication technologies, technical and marketing assistance (knowledge transfer and exchange), and the formation of marketing networks since today, it is impossible for a single individual to manage all activities in the production and commercialization process.

Thus, a successful case at the Andean level is the "Andean Network of Quinoa Producers", which brought together quinoa producer associations from Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. This network was established to improve management in production, processing, and commercialization of quinoa and to enhance socio-economic conditions (FAO, 2017). In Colombia, Giraldo, Lopera, and Cardona (2020) describe the dynamics of community associations and rural development

policies in Pereira, with the goal of identifying the positive impacts generated in three cooperatives. As the municipality's policies were implemented, new entrepreneurship ideas emerged, and productive and social projects were developed.

However, we must ask ourselves: What is the new role of associativity? Answering this question requires identifying the new productive paradigms and the opportunities underlying globalization. It involves acting on key aspects of business dynamics: strategic management, risk monitoring, technological modernization, establishing a managerial approach, strengthening human capacities, and implementing technological and administrative restructuring (Gatto, 1999). All of these should aim at regional, institutional, and sectoral development in collaboration with the market, the state, and academia.

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