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Abstract: This research aims to determine the role of women in the development of rural areas through agriculture and the integration of women into society in Kosovo. An observational, quantitative, cross-sectional case study was conducted for this purpose. Primary data was collected from the employees of the agriculture cooperative “Krusha e Madhe” in Kosovo through a questionnaire survey, interviews, and observations. The social cooperative under study is a good example of how bringing disadvantaged women together can help improve economic life and the psychological trauma caused by war. The results prove that there is indeed a significant increase in community life, cooperation, trust, quality of life, and communication in the community since establishing social cooperative.

Keywords: Community life, social cooperatives, gender empowerment, Kosovo

Abstrakti: Ky hulumtim synon të përcaktojë rolin e gruas në zhvillimin e zonave rurale përmes bujqësisë dhe integritimit të gruas në shoqërinë e Kosovës. Për këtë qëllim, është realizuar një studim vëzhgues, sasior, dhe ndërseksional. Të dhënat primare janë mbledhur nga 52 punonjës të kooperativës bujqësore “Krusha e Madhe” në Kosovë nëpërmjet pyetësorëve të strukturuar, intervistave dhe vëzhgimeve. Kooperativa sociale në studim është një shembull i mirë se si bashkimi i grave në disavantazh mund të ndihmojë në përmirësimin e jetës ekonomike dhe traumave psikologjike të shkaktuara nga lufta. Rezultatet vërtetojnë se ka vërtet një rritje të ndjeshme në jetën e komunitetit, bashkëpunimin, besimin, cilësinë e jetës dhe komunikimin në komunitet që nga themelimi i kooperativës sociale.

Fjalë kyçe: Komunitet, jeta në komunitet, kooperativa sociale, fuqizimi gjinor

Highlights

- In disadvantaged regions, it is particularly difficult to forge common economic interests and build cooperation.
- The social cooperative in the municipality under study succeeded.
- Our survey shows that social cooperative is highly beneficial to the community.
- The war in Europe gives the study particular relevance.

1. Introduction

Postmodern regional or rural development is often characterised by diversity. This is a chance to meet the increasing demands of healthy food, natural raw materials, catering, local products. The postmodern regional (and rural) development is supporting the need for variety, diversity and personalisation in many cases, too (Fekete-Lipták, 2011). The decline of the welfare state was an important trigger for the growth and development of the social economy, but other factors also played a role. These included changes in local economies, the exclusion of disadvantaged groups, and the changing role of NGOs. Social economy organizations have filled the gaps left by the market and the state and have proved innovative and adaptable to new societal roles (Ritter, 2015). In stagnating areas, unemployment is even worse than average, entrepreneurship is minimal, and there is little or no foreign capital. The stagnation may be due to the over-agricultural character of the area, its location close to the national and county borders, and the lack of a major urban center (Káposzta et al., 2020). In the same time, unemployment and the resulting financial and psychological burden can put pressure on a person that they will not be able to reintegrate without social support. (Csoba, 2010)

The concept of 'social economy' experts used to name 'social sector', 'third sector', 'social economy', 'social economy', 'social enterprise' and 'social enterprise' too. They try to give different emphasis, or

dissimilar meanings, using the synonyms of the base concept to the same activity. The different meanings of the concept of social economy does not mean the shortage of stable elements of the concept. These have been consistently present in recent decades, irrespective of the conceptual discussions (Csoba, 2020).

Two internationally agreed documents provide a reference point for the principles, values and purpose of cooperatives; the Rochdale Co-operative Constitution and the Declaration of the International Co-operative Alliance at its Manchester Congress. The Rochdale Statutes state that "The object and function of the co-operative shall be to provide for the material advancement of its members and to promote their social and economic advancement." At the Manchester Congress, the following cooperative principles were laid down: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, economic participation of members, autonomy and independence, education, training, information, cooperation between cooperatives, community responsibility. In addition, self-help; individual responsibility; democracy; equality; justice; solidarity were formulated as values. On this basis, it can be stated that, in line with the approach and values of the social economy, the cooperative form is a suitable form of social enterprise for achieving the objectives of the third sector, i.e., the social economy (Bak, 2010).

Women-headed households are a well-known phenomenon in many countries around the world, including Kosovo (Kumar 2000). In most countries, this family structure is between 10 and 30 percent, but in Southern Africa, for example, the proportion is significantly higher. Many women heads of this target group work in agriculture and they are of particular importance for agricultural policy, as most of them work in agriculture. A common feature of female heads of agricultural households is that they are discriminated. They have limited access to land, credit, and production equipment (Namubiru-Mwaura, 2014). A distinction is made between *de facto* and *de jure* categories of female-headed households, but for the purposes of this research, only *de jure* female-headed households (FHHs) will be discussed hereafter, since in the case of widows and especially war widows, because the role of head of household is legally the woman's in this situation (Doss, SOFA Team, 2011).

Households that are legally classified as FHHs, such as Kosovars, can be found in many countries from Africa to Asia. For example, there are large numbers of *de jure* female heads of household in Uganda and the Philippines too (Appleton, 1996) (Morada et al., 2001). In many countries, women heads of households who have been left alone in war, often victims of violence, are encouraged to become farmers by organizing cooperative systems. (Rehn – Sirleaf, 2002). In Malawi, following the 1994 genocide, the country faced several problems and responded by developing a cooperative system, which has successfully implemented a policy requiring the participation of women leaders in cooperatives (Borda-Rodriguez – Vicari, 2014). Relevant research shows that, although a causal link between the involvement of women cooperative members and the success of cooperatives cannot be scientifically proven, but women appear to have higher acceptance and they have better support scores than their male counterparts (Meador, O'Brien, 2019).

In Sri Lanka, women's cooperatives provide rural women with a way out of extreme poverty and a means of daily livelihood. Researchers have shown that there is a positive correlation between rural farmers' living standards and cooperative membership, based on four measured variables. In the case of women's cooperatives, this result implies that cooperative membership has a clear impact on raising families' living standards. On this basis, the research proposes to increase knowledge about women's cooperatives and to improve the availability and conditions of credit for this purpose (Jayawardena, Rathnasiri 2019).

Agricultural cooperatives provide an alternative for micro, small, and medium-sized farmers to achieve activities and services as a community in terms of sales, procurement, technology, and certain services (warehousing, logistics, etc.). In doing so, they provide their members with socio-economic functions that would otherwise be unavailable to them or only at a disproportionate cost (Ortmann – King, 2007). Some studies have found that the participation of a greater number of women in the boards and representative bodies of cooperatives has a particularly positive impact on the cooperatives (Nilsen – Huse, 2010; Hernández-Nicolás et al, 2019).

In Europe, the substantive economic approach manifests itself in the social economy, which does not have the same depth of social content and responsibility as the solidarity economy, and in practice involves the activities of social enterprises. For widows of Krushë e Madhe, the social problems it faces and the village's predominantly agrarian character mean that the substantive economy can provide an answer to all the shortcomings that are typical of the social strata concerned and of the local context, and which are outside the formal economy. In this municipality which has its own social, economic and natural characteristics and resources, it is desired a shift towards the substantive economy. This would enable widows to be reintegrated into society by means of a solidarity and social economy, taking advantage of the fundamental characteristics of the substantive economy (Varga-Jeney, 2020).

Over the last 30 years, Kosovo's agriculture industry has undergone a significant transformation. Due to Yugoslavia's dissolution, the government used to buy all the farmer's agricultural products. When this system fell apart, the state cooperatives were dissolved, and the farmers went back to their old ways, selling their goods at the local market (Agrilinks, 2020).

The majority of Kosovo's population, around 62%, lives in rural areas. Local and central authorities, as well as international investors, consider agriculture to be one of the most important areas for development (Marija Milenkovic et al., 2017). Agriculture generates roughly 10% of revenue in rural areas, according to estimates. Family members who are employed and get wages to provide significant revenue for rural families, which is augmented by income from family members who work abroad (Ministry of Agriculture, 2010).

Agricultural cooperatives have helped to enhance the quality of life in rural areas. One of the most well-known social cooperatives is "Krusha e Madhe," which was founded by the women of Krusha e Madhe. Because of the massacre in their village, in which the majority of the men were killed by the Serbian army, those women are known as the Widowed Women of Kosovo. The women went to Albania and returned after the war was over. However, all of their homes and schools had been burned to the ground. They decided to change their lives and become the breadwinners of their families. They were able to develop Krusha and its economy as a result of this. Planting and renewing their lands were the start of their cooperative work. They began making traditional recipes and preserving winter food soon. The owner of the agriculture cooperative "Krusha e Madhe" was able to secure the employment of women from rural communities and rise to the top of her agricultural cooperative, which is run and staffed entirely by women.

Our study is mainly based on a questionnaire survey of employees of the social cooperative Krusha e Madhe. Although the survey includes an extensive literature review, the focus of our research is on a single cooperative, no comparison with other social cooperatives has been made in essence. Our study is therefore a case study. In the remainder of the research, we will also look at residents of municipalities who do not work in a social cooperative.

2. The role of social cooperatives

Kosovo is a country in the Western Balkans of Europe with a population of around 1,810,000. The vast majority of the population is ethnic Albanian. It has a surface area of 10 887 km² and a population density of 166 capita per km². Kosovo's history has been marked by Great Powers and ethnic conflict since 1912, but since the early 1980s, the struggle for independence and then statehood has been a full-scale determining everyday life (Vickers – Fraser, 1998). Kosovo's current ethnic proportions have been shaped by numerous factors. The population change of the last decades, which has resulted in an overwhelming Albanian majority, is partly due to the very high Albanian birth rate, but also to the Albanian immigrants from neighboring countries (Macedonia, Montenegro) and the emigration of Kosovo Serbs (Jashari, 2019).

However, the almost entirely ethnic Albanian society has suffered significant demographic distortions along the way. In the nearly two decades up to 1999, ethnic fighting was constant, to a lesser or greater extent, and many ethnic Albanian men were victims of it (Blagojević, 2000). As a sad consequence of these processes, but especially of the 1998–1999 war, many women became widows and victims of violence. It is a sad fact that the ethnic wars of the Western Balkans' had the part of a significant role in

the 'war between the genders', which has contributed to the development of 'conflictual and antagonistic' perspectives on social relations (Hughson 2012).

Because of the problems referred to above, there are many single women in Kosovo who are faced with difficulties in making a living. Now, the only realistic alternative for them is self-sufficiency. The Kosovar government, together with the European Union and local NGO-s, are doing a lot to promote women's equality and through this, the social well-being of single women. However, these changes are not without difficulties (Canaj, 2021).

The women concerned have typically remained alone since their widowhood. Although they are victims of the struggle for freedom, they have been marginalized in post-war Kosovo society because, as victims of organized and systematic violence during the war, they are a reminder of the past to a society that has not yet been able to come to terms with these terrible happenings and their consequences for women (Aliu, 2020).

Single women's self-sufficiency, access to land, and social support are below average. Although the law on real estate and other property provides for gender equality, this is not enforced in the acquisition of property rights due to deep-rooted social traditions. The vast majority of the land is acquired by men through inheritance procedures, as social custom dictates. As a result, only 15.2% of women own property, and this proportion is even worse for land. This is a great limit on their opportunities to participate in farming (FAO, 2017).

Women's vulnerability is further compounded by the fact that in Kosovo, the proportion of women who are in extreme poverty have a higher rate of the already high overall poverty rate than men and are at a higher potential risk of poverty too. Women are clearly the majority of those who are living in extreme poverty. This suggests that there is a relevant gender gap in poverty in Kosovo, i.e., women are more vulnerable to poverty (Verme, 2004).

Women victims of war violence are typically undereducated or uneducated. Because of this, and because of their dissonant social perception, there were significant obstacles to rebuilding their lives after the war (Kienzler, 2020). The women concerned lacked the economic basis to improve their situation and financially manage their recovery, while the victims, namely single mothers/widows, were in dire need of improving their economic and psychosocial situation. Law No 04/L-054 treats the victims as civilian victims, not as martyrs, and thus does not treat them as a priority target group for reparation, compensation, psychosocial support, health care, and economic rehabilitation (Aliu, 2020). As can be seen from the above, women who have been victims of enemy violence and/or widowed during the struggle for independence in Kosovo faced difficulties to access adequate support in formal settings. Social cooperatives and individual NGOs in Kosovo are trying to fill this gap in part or in full.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in rural areas of Kosovo (Osmani et al. 2013). According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD), the average size of farms in Kosovo agriculture is 1.5 hectares and their activities are mainly concentrated on the livelihood business (Ramadani, Bytyqi, 2018). The majority of small farms depend almost entirely on agriculture for their livelihoods (Gjokaj et al., 2017). Kosovo has a relatively high population density, and the agricultural land per capita is correspondingly small (0.24 ha) (Sauer et al. 2012). Today, 86% of agricultural land is privately owned and operated by family farms; the remainder is owned by community-owned enterprises (13%) and producer cooperatives (1%) (Sauer et al. 2012).

Women own only 4.9% of agricultural land (Arënliu et al., 2021). Lands are historically inherited from the male line (Reineck, 1991). This also hinders the agricultural activity of single women. In addition, women are less likely to benefit from employment services and active labour measures. In addition, the empowerment of women is not easy for them, as there are cultural, economic, and educational barriers to the intensity of the measures (Office of the Prime Minister 2020).

5.8% of non-cooperative farms are headed by women, but cooperative farms have twice more women as managers, so overall the proportion of women is very low, but still relevant to the deviation in favour of cooperatives, where the proportion of women is almost double (11.1%) (Muriqi et al., 2021). Some research has explained this by the fact that, unlike men, women are more willing to cooperate with each

other, easier to send them to training courses, are more committed to the work, and pay more attention to agricultural production therefore they are better in the situations where high-level cooperation is needed (Muriqi et al., 2021).

Also according to the KAS (Kosovo Agency for Statistics), women's participation in entrepreneurial activities is limited, which indirectly affects the number of women employed in the private sector (Ramadani et al., 2015a). In addition, there is gender segregation by occupational category: women work mainly in education, commerce, and health, which require a certain level of education, while war widows are typically undereducated. For them, the only option in rural areas is to work in the agricultural sector (Osmani et al. 2013). Accordingly, half of the agricultural labour force is family labour, 58.2 percent of whom are women. These data indicate that women are a significant factor in the labour supply in this sector. It should be noted, however, that this form of employment is often informal, which means that women have less income and do not pay pension insurance also, which is also a major risk for single women (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020).

Formally, women are under-represented as economic managers in the agricultural sector, and the registered are only 5% of them. Lack of ownership, low education levels, unregistered employment, poor access to information on subsidies, and gender roles socialized into society undermine their participation. This has also put women at a disadvantage in terms of agricultural subsidies, with only 2% of them receiving state support for agriculture (Farnsworth et al., 2018).

The share of women entrepreneurs in the Kosovo economy is hardly 10%. These enterprises are typically micro and small enterprises. The level of entrepreneurship among women in Kosovo is low and the businesses they run are typically smaller (Ramadani et al., 2015b). Agricultural businesses largely produce organic and local products. Some research also shows that women are forced to finance their start-ups largely from their own savings or borrow from friends and family because access to bank loans is difficult for them (Tmava et al., 2013). Women's decision to start a business is often motivated by the need to survive, practically the only way out of poverty, and not due to personal career or ambition. The success of the business started is influenced by the attitude of families. In family farms run by women, male work power within the family is objectively absent. To overcome this gap, women-owned businesses in Kosovo tend to employ informal workers. In addition, the fact that they have outdated equipment is a problem (Efendić et al., 2017).

The range of activities is characterized by a predominance of traditional women's activities such as crop production and food processing. The women's farms concerned are typically active in sectors where the scope for business growth is limited, for example, because of the production constraints caused by small farm sizes (Shkodra, et al. 2021). Labour-intensive horticultural and livestock farming is a typical activity of agricultural SMEs in Kosovo. This form of farming gives people a very strong rural identity and a sense of cultural identity. It has traditionally provided farming communities with a decent livelihood (Kostov et al., 2021).

Some studies also show that 61.94% of women-owned farms are between 0.2 and 1.0 hectares in size, which is an extremely small farm size and only marginally sufficient for subsistence. In the case of the survey referred to, farm performance was further constrained by the fact that only 40.48% of respondents had formal education (Shkodra, Bajrami, 2022). This is in line with the general finding that the educational attainment of female farm managers is below the average (Osmani et al., 2013). The researchers also found that education, gross income, and net wealth also had a significant positive impact on the success rate of economic activity (Mahmutaj – Krasniqi, 2020).

As can be seen from other research, the land tenure structure in Kosovo is fragmented (Hartvigsen, 2013). This is further exacerbated by the conversion of agricultural land into residential or industrial zones (Murseli, Dana 2016). Due to the above-mentioned conditions, the production volume per farmer is low and access to modern inputs and high-quality technologies is not ensured, as the financial return on investment is not guaranteed with such low production volumes. Generally speaking, for the above reasons and because of the difficulties of market access, there is also a lack of viable producer cooperatives and other forms of farmer groups (Muriqi et al., 2021).

Kosovo's agricultural supply chains are not functioning optimally, with a number of weaknesses that weaken the system, and this is affecting already disadvantaged women, and farmers, more than the average. Most of these problems can be addressed through investment support, but it is also crucial that small farmers are integrated in some way. This could be achieved, for example, by setting up crop collection centres or cooperatives, as coordination can improve the quality of production and marketing positions vis-à-vis customers, and also help knowledge transfer (Gjokaj et al., 2021).

However, the majority of employment and social problems faced by disadvantaged widowed women are adequately addressed by well-functioning cooperatives that are able to serve the interests of producers adequately too. It is, therefore, worthwhile to examine the activities of cooperatives that have adopted good practices in the form of case studies and to examine the attitudes of the workers who work in them, to provide a model for the development of the activities and structures of future cooperatives.

3. Methodology

This study investigates the role of women in the development of rural areas through agriculture and the integration of women into society in Kosovo. The first part of the study is based on a literature review and the second part is based on primary data. The data in the tables and graphs are taken from our questionnaire survey. The respondents were employees of the agriculture cooperative Krusha e Madhe. In this research, one of the main objectives was to obtain the anonymity of the respondents; it made sure to keep the privacy and confidentiality of the identity of the participants. The main research tool was the questionnaire survey of 52 respondents. The online questionnaire was sent via email to the managers of the Agriculture Cooperative "Krusha e Madhe" and then it was delivered to the workers of this cooperative. Respondents filled in the questionnaire anonymously, without the presence of the cooperative's manager, who did not influence the response. They had one month (more precisely May 2022) to fill out this questionnaire. The questionnaire included open-ended and close-ended questions, too.

After the survey was conducted for receiving the data and conducting the further proceedings of the research, all the collected responses of the participants were managed by organizing it in Microsoft Excel files. Then the data were transferred to the software system Statistical Package for Social Sciences. SPSS is known for its reliability, credibility, and capacity to generate analytical reports and illustrative descriptions. Through this program, a more detailed analysis was created, comparisons between variables, and combinations between variables. The data were also subjected to hypothesis testing, and the results presented are significant in all cases.

The questionnaire was compiled into three parts:

- 1) Data of the respondents – included questions regarding age, gender, settlement, date of birth, level of education, number of family members, marital status, the average monthly electricity, and the average monthly food bills in their home.
- 2) Questions regarding integration – in this part, the questions were related to communication, trust, life quality, and cooperation since the establishment of the cooperative, their responsibilities in the cooperative, and the training issues if they received any.
- 3) Questions regarding cooperative – most of this interrogation part included questions about how they thought of cooperatives, their motivation to go to work, what cooperatives could do better, the work environment, etc.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used in questions 1–8 of the questionnaires given to respondents. These questions are related to gender, age, settlement, level of education, the number of family members, marital status, and the average monthly expenditure on electricity and food. The second section contains primary research data that can be used to conduct a more thorough investigation. Questions 9–25 are designed to intend and analyze their opinions, attitudes, and preferences. These questions remain regarding community life, cooperation, trust issues, quality of life, and communication in the community. Also, there are questions about their daily responsibilities (position), if they received

any training, what they associate with cooperatives, the most satisfying aspect of working in this cooperative if they feel comfortable in the environment in which they work, and what's the best thing that happened to them after joining this company.

In addition to the structured online questionnaire, information was obtained through interviews. Fahrije Hoti (owner of the agriculture cooperative "Krusha e Madhe"), Arton Zeneli (manager of the cooperative), and Selami Hoti (head of the village Krusha e Madhe) took part in the interview. The five-hour interview covered topics such as the cooperative's history, production, employment, technology, empowerment, and so on. Of course, the site visit and personal observation were not missed either.

4. Results of the survey on employees of Krusha e Madhe social cooperative

Krusha e Madhe is home to approximately 6000 citizens, 96% of whom are of ethnic Albanian descent, and 4% are Roma representing around 20–30 families in the village. Even the Roma people of this village have family members killed in the last war and they are still missing along with the rest of the missing (Hoti, 2022).

In Kosovo, many women were victims of violence and/or widowed in the 1998–1999 ethnic war. They are seen as victims by society but receive less support than war veterans and families of the heroic dead. During the decades of struggle for independence, Kosovo society has been isolated from the achievements of the modern world and has found it difficult to develop. As a result, the quality of education, the economy, and social conditions are very different from those in other parts of Europe. Ancestral traditions are much stronger here, and this has a significant impact on the situation of war widows. Women are under-educated, as it was not customary for women to pursue higher education in their youth. The acquisition of property, be it land or a house, is limited for women because social traditions favour inheritance and acquisition of property on the male side. The same is true for starting a business. Women find it more difficult to obtain credit, and the majority of male members of local government are reluctant to support starting a business with a female head. In rural areas in particular, women are therefore most likely to seek income from agriculture and food processing.

Recently, agricultural cooperatives in Kosovo have contributed to the development of rural areas. One of the most known is called Women of Krusha e Madhe. The women who founded the cooperative had lost their husbands in the war in Kosovo and started to form a social cooperative after returning to their village. The women who are now the heads of households decided to change their fate and become the income generators of the village. A remarkable lesson from our research is that the cooperative can help precisely the most disadvantaged – middle-aged women widowed in war, with low levels of education. We believe that our case study is not only of interest to war-affected communities.

With the support of the European Union, women's cooperatives have been established in Kosovo, and these organizations seek to integrate the agricultural activities of women (widows) with special needs. "KB KRUSHA" is the main cooperative of this kind, founded by a war widow, Fahrije Hoti, who lives in the village of Krusha e Madhe. The cooperative is mainly engaged in the cultivation of paprika, which is sold in a processed form, for example as ajvar, both domestically and abroad (Muriqi et al. 2021).

This cooperative was able to immediately gain notoriety by shattering many social taboos, including those against widowed women working, obtaining a driver's license, and operating a motor vehicle. The circle did not expect widows to prioritize their careers, achieve both individual and group success, and reject societally imposed weddings. Through their initiative and dedication, those ladies were mentioned in various news stories, interviews, and documentaries, which is how we learned about their cooperation and how they came to be known. This cooperative is well-known practically everywhere in Kosovo. These women's history is seen as evidence of resistance, solidarity, and life reconstruction.

All data used in the analysis were collected via an online questionnaire distributed to the employees of AG “Krusha e Madhe”, who were asked a variety of questions to analyze the impact of the social cooperative. Among the 52 respondents, 6% were male, while 94% of respondents were female, revealing that the reason for higher women's involvement in the agricultural cooperative is because of the good impact on women's motivation to engage, the growth of innovation, as well as the increase in productivity, incomes and improved production. (Table 1).

Tab 1. The gender of the respondents (%). Source: Own contribution, 2022

	Percent
Male	6
Female	94

Living close to their place of employment was significant for the majority of the workforce in view of the fact that it allowed them to spend more time with their families, save money on transportation costs, and lessen their carbon footprint, concluding it with analysis. Most of the workers of the agricultural cooperative “Krusha e Madhe” live in Krusha e Madhe representing 70% of the sample. 12 % live in Krushë e Vogël, Hocë e Vogël 7% live, while in Celinë 6% live, and in Rogovë live 5% of the workers (Figure 1).

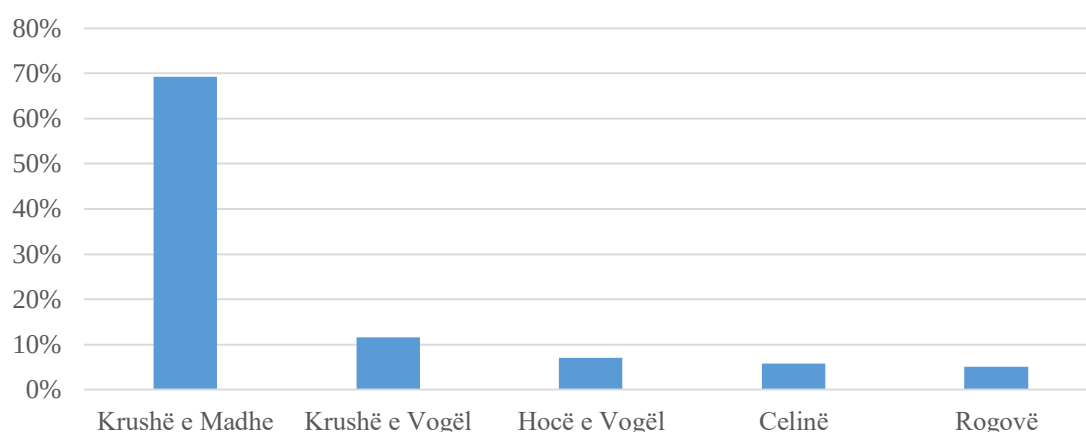


Fig 1. Settlement of the respondents (%). Source: Own contribution, 2022

As shown in the data in Table 2. 13% of those surveyed were single. 37% were married, 4% were divorced, and the vast majority were widows representing 46% of the sample. Confirming to us what is known is that most of the women of this village are widowed due to the war waged in Kosovo by Serbian forces.

Tab 2. The marital status of the respondents (%). Source: Own contribution, 2022

Single		Married	Divorced	Widow	Total
13		37	4	46	100

The social cooperative workers live in large families. This is especially true since we know that most of them are widows. The size of the families is shown in table 3. The average family size is 5 people (4.98).

Tab 3. The number of family members (persons). Source: Own contribution, 2022

Family members	Percent
1	1.9
2	3.8
3	15.4
4	21.2
5	26.9
6	15.4
7	5.8
8	3.8
10	1.9
12	3.8

Education improves workers' capacity to gather, decipher, and comprehend information, enabling them to use the knowledge at their disposal to more effectively address production, and market challenges. Nonetheless, although education is crucial in an agricultural cooperative, the vast majority (69%) of the employees in the social cooperative have completed primary education, 7% have completed secondary education and 8% have completed tertiary education. 6%, unfortunately have, no education at all, implying that the cooperative's primary goal is to assist widows in ensuring their living, besides their level of education.

Tab 4. The level of education of the respondents (%). Source: Own contribution, 2022

No education	Primary school	High school	College	Total
6	69	17	8	100

The age distribution of workers is relatively balanced but slightly skewed towards older workers. Nearly two-thirds are over 40 years old, providing a higher level of experience, and being more focused on their work. On the other side, it also contributes toward staying in the job longer and taking fewer days off, because most of the younger employees have little kids, and based on this, they need to arrange their working hours. (see Table 5).

Tab 5. The age of respondents (%). Source: Own contribution, 2022

	Valid Percent
22–31 years old	15
32–41 years old	21
42–51 years old	37
52–61 years old	27

In the course of the research, it was important to examine issues related to the operation of the cooperative. The first and perhaps most important question was whether the cooperative had contributed in any way to poverty reduction in the community. The answer was quite clear, with all respondents saying yes, aiming towards direct wage employment to people, self-employment to members, and indirect employment through spillover of their income-generating operations. The next question asked about other factors. We asked in which area the cooperative's activities were most important. Table 6 shows that the cooperative is seen by the employees of the cooperative mainly as a source of income (69.2%), contributing as a potential source of employment, contributing to national

income, and being significant to international trade, but most essentially, it is seen as a source of revenue. Almost half of the respondents emphasized cooperation and business opportunities, mainly linking it to the lack of commitment of members, market risk, weather impact, and sustainability. The least (32.7%) thought of it as a way of life primarily tying it to profit, increasing investment, and producing food for a constantly growing population.

Tab 6. Which one do you consider the most important when you think of cooperative? (%) Source: Own contribution, 2022

	Yes	No
Income source	69.2	30.8
Agricultural cooperation	53.8	46.2
Business	51.9	48.1
Lifestyle	32.7	67.3

Table 7 shows that the cooperative leader has strong support. Most members feel comfortable in the cooperative because they have a good relationship with the cooperative leader, due to the mutual trust that has been established over time. The ability and behaviour of the leader can influence how motivated and productive each employee is. (The assessment of Alshaabani and Rudnák (2022) shows that the engagement of the workers is essential for all managers when thinking about improving employee outcomes.) Less important are a good atmosphere, a friendly environment, a mutually supportive atmosphere, and colleagues.

Tab 7. What do you think is the most satisfying part of working in this cooperative? (%). Source: own contribution, 2022.

	Selected	Not selected
Having a good relationship with the leader	76.9	23.1
Friendly environment	55.8	44.2
Mutual support	48.1	51.9
Colleagues	40.4	59.6

The employees of the cooperative were questioned about their experiences and what they considered the finest thing that had happened to them since joining the cooperative. The results are as follows: 36% of the workers considered the opportunity to get integrated into the community and at the workplace, in view of the fact that the majority of workers are widows and their circumstances, having a job improved their ability to make decisions, increase their social connections and possibilities. Given that the majority of them are self-feeding mothers, 17% of them chose personal incomes they receive with the main focus of providing for their families. Since our knowledge grows as we get more experience, 17% of respondents acknowledged the opportunity to find employment, accumulate experience, and improve in their careers. 13% of the employees declared that friendship is very important to them because it makes them feel more relaxed, optimistic, and caring. The cooperative's members provide one another with support, and aid one another when they are in need. Even throughout the cooperation visit, this was evident. Along with the widespread damage to cities, their economies, and their social order, the war also had an impact on their mentality. The war had a profound effect on their mentality, and 8% of the workers said the cooperative helped them forget and to ease the memories of the war because they have the possibility to talk about it, and to do something positive. Those women aspire to live to their fullest potential, to make better decisions, and to create positive changes, and that is why gaining knowledge and experience was defined as improving one's abilities and increasing one's sense of empowerment, and it was highlighted by 4% of the employees. 2% of the employees proclaimed the opportunity to break the taboos because at that time women weren't allowed to work, get a driver's license, or drive a car, but

together they managed to achieve their primary goals. While the opportunity to cooperate with farmers and produce new products was mentioned by 2% of the employees (see figure 2).

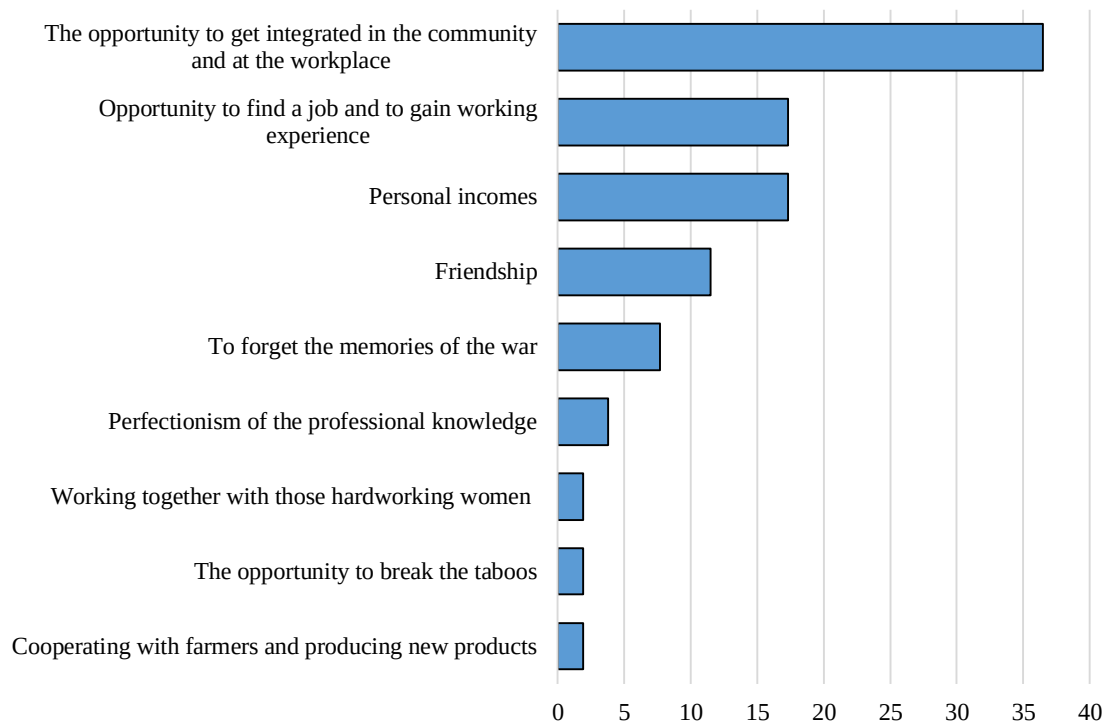


Fig 2. The best experiences of the respondents after joining the cooperative (%). Source: Own contribution, 2022

To assess the cooperative's success, we also considered the motivation and desire of the employees. Human interaction is a key component of social change. Improved social change enriches society and improves social and human conditions, and 13% of workers consider that this is the most important factor in getting the chance to have an impact on their community and society. Empowerment as their driving force was considered by 21% of employees leading to greater creativity, trust in leadership, and creating a sense of responsibility. Empowerment in this area is helping to eradicate poverty from society because they are feeding themselves and their families with the money they earn and they are becoming financially independent. While the majority (36%) mentioned the great environment in the cooperative as the source of motivation, allowing them to network with one another, collaborate, and boost productivity. And 29% noted the salary as the primary point of incentive being interdependent with perks and compensation.



Fig 3. The motivation of the cooperative members (%). Source: Own contribution, 2022

The questionnaire asked separately whether cooperation, communication, quality of life, and trust in the community had increased since the creation of the social cooperative. Everyone said that cooperation, trust, communication, and quality of life in the community had increased. The “Women of Krusha e Madhe” social cooperative is unified by its value-based operations, which enable it to deliver vital services to its community and preserve business administration by the people at the core of each organization. The social cooperative supports the community in many ways by assisting the workers and the village. The community’s benefits include acting as role models for young girls and other women, integrating into society, developing their talents, generating new employment opportunities, and other benefits.

We learned through the interviews that the cooperative creates dignified work, provides outstanding services or products, and has a steadfast dedication to the community and service. Selami Hoti, the local mayor, was the one who highlighted this point the most. He noted in the interview that the cooperative increased the community's economic independence, social and human capital development, and communal stabilization. Along with the mayor, Fahrije Hoti, the cooperative's head, stated that integrating women into the community was the cooperative's primary contribution to the community. We discovered and validated this claim.

According to another finding from the questionnaire and interview, the cooperative is helping to alleviate and reduce poverty. The cooperative does this by offering the workers funding choices and skill development so they can become eligible for high-quality jobs and build a better life. Additionally, the study found that since the founding of the social cooperative, there has been an improvement in communal life, collaboration, trust, quality of life, and communication. They were able to identify significant problems and find solutions as a result, which increased their sense of community and engagement in the implementation of their decisions.

5. Conclusions

Community-supported agriculture is prevalent in Kosovo, where consumers and producers are directly linked helping to create a more profitable and transparent local food system. However, the formation of cooperatives by war widows is not common. This study offers pertinent new findings that help pinpoint several elements that affect agricultural cooperation in Kosovo, especially the agriculture cooperative of “Krusha e Madhe”. The results show that the cooperative has a very significant impact on the community. The creation of a cooperative can alleviate the losses caused by war, provide livelihoods, increase women's self-confidence and empowerment, and make a vital contribution to their livelihoods and to building a stronger community.

The survey was conducted among the staff of the agricultural cooperative "Krusha e Madhe," and each employee was interviewed, therefore the sample size is adequate. The vast majority of the workers of this cooperative are females and also widows, due to the war that happened in Kosovo. Also, the analysis demonstrates that since the establishment of the social cooperative, community life, collaboration, trust, quality of life, and communication have all improved. Our research revealed that the agricultural cooperative is a factor contributing to poverty reduction. The table analysis attests to the validity that most of the employees are delighted for joining the cooperative because of the opportunity to get integrated into the community and at the workplace, increase their incomes, to forget the memories of the war and other benefits.

The cooperative’s leader and the cooperative have a good impact on the community for multiple reasons, some of them are: through maintaining close societal membership, cooperatives promote ties, and create social networks. As a result, people have unified with each other. By integrating people to work especially women, the leader of the cooperative managed to mitigate poverty and create women’s empowerment, which is highly respected by the community. Aside from this, there is money circulation creating financial profit and economic growth for the community.

The cooperation influenced even the ethical approach. As was mentioned above in the village Krusha e Madhe, where Albanian and Roma ethnicity live, the relationship between them is very good, said

the mayor of the village Selami Hoti. They maintain this positive bond through good communication, mutual respect, trust, and problem-solving. The citizens of the village were asked to, and they declared that they are very happy with the communication, trust, and especially with the problem-solving issues in the community because they are in touch with the leader of the cooperative and mayor. In the interview, they mentioned a few issues they had such as the wastewater issue they encountered and how the mayor quickly assisted to resolve it.

Our research clearly shows that women who are left alone/widowed after each war face difficulties in their lives. Their ability to work to support themselves and their families are extremely limited. In the third world and developing countries, the level of economic and educational development is below average, with the massive consequence that this target group is typically undereducated, poor, and also faces social challenges/prejudices.

Community-supported agriculture helped to add value, cooperation and, increase collaboration in the community. The mayor of the village states that the agriculture cooperative of “Women of Krusha e Madhe” is a success story, that helped the community to integrate after the war and to develop the economy of the village. He affirms that the goodwill, hard work, and perseverance that those women had, resulted in the achievement of their goals.

Our research explored the livelihood and other economic opportunities of the people concerned from the perspective of a specific social group, synthesizing the findings of previous studies to provide an adequate answer to the difficult question of how widows and disadvantaged women as heads of the households can survive, thrive and be useful members of society in a restrictive environment. One of the major findings of the research is that taking into account the current social constraints of women, especially war widows, it presents an alternative that will enable the target group to live happier, more liveable and thus more fulfilling lives. General conclusions cannot be drawn from our case study for other social cooperatives. But the case presented here demonstrates that the social cooperative as an institution can be capable of achieving both economic and community goals.

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