



Women's Cooperatives as Agents of Social Transformation and the Local Economy: A Content Analysis

Kadın Kooperatifleri: Toplumsal Dönüşüm ve Yerel Ekonominin Önemli Aktörleri Üzerine Bir İçerik Analizi

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Öz

Türkiye’de kadın emeği, uzun yıllar boyunca görünmez bir iş gücü olarak değerlendirilmiş, özellikle kırsal alanlarda ücretsiz aile işçiliği ve kayıt dışı istihdamla sınırlandırılmıştır. Son yıllarda artan kadın kooperatifleri, bu görünmez emeği ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel açıdan görünür kılan önemli örgütlenmeler hâline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma, kadın kooperatiflerinin sürdürülebilir kalkınmaya katkılarını ve kadınların bireysel, toplumsal ve kurumsal düzeyde nasıl güçlendiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma soruları, kadın kooperatiflerinin yerel ekonomi ve toplumsal kalkınmaya etkisi, hangi temaların ön plana çıktığı ve destek mekanizmalarının nasıl işlediği etrafında şekillendirilmiştir. Araştırma verileri, Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu (TRT) tarafından yayımlanan ve İç Anadolu Bölgesi’ndeki kadın kooperatiflerini konu alan Hayallerinin Peşinde adlı programın 12 bölümünden elde edilmiştir. Veriler, yönlendirilmiş içerik analizi yöntemiyle çözümlenmiş; beş üst tema ve bunlara bağlı alt temalar doğrultusunda sınıflandırılmıştır. Bulgular, kadınların yalnızca üretim süreçlerinde değil; teknik beceriler, girişimcilik kültürü, karar alma ve liderlik alanlarında da aktif aktörler olarak temsil edildiklerini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, aile desteği öne çıkarken, Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları (STK) iş birliklerinin sınırlı kaldığı görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak çalışma, kadın kooperatiflerinin sürdürülebilir kalkınma, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ve kadın emeğinin görünürlüğü açısından kritik bir rol oynadığını ortaya koymakta; literatürde ekonomik odaklı araştırmaların ötesinde kültürel ve söylemsel bir boyut sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sürdürülebilir Beceri, Kadın Emeği, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Girişimcilik, Kadın Girişimciliği, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

In Türkiye, women's labor has long been considered invisible work, particularly evident in rural areas, where it has been limited to unpaid family labor and informal employment. In recent years, the growing number of women's cooperatives has transformed this invisible labor into significant organizations that makes this invisible labor visible economically, socially, and culturally. This study examines women's cooperatives' contributions to sustainable development and how women are empowered at individual, social, and institutional levels. The research questions focus on the impact of women's cooperatives on the local economy and social development, which themes are most prominent, and how support mechanisms operate. The research data were obtained from 12 episodes of the program *Hayallerinin Peşinde* (In Pursuit of Dreams), broadcast by the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) which features women's cooperatives in the Central Anatolia Region. The data was analyzed using a directed content analysis method and classified under five main themes and their corresponding sub-themes. The findings show that women are represented not only in production processes but also as active actors in technical skills, entrepreneurial culture, decision-making, and leadership. Additionally, while family support emerged as a key factor, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) were found to be limited. In conclusion, the study highlights that women's cooperatives play a critical role in sustainable development, gender equality, and the visibility of women's labor; it offers a cultural and discursive dimension beyond the economic-focused research in the literature.

Keywords: Sustainable Skills, Women's Labor, Social Gender, Entrepreneurship, Women's Entrepreneurship, Türkiye

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, women's cooperatives have become an important tool for rural development and gender equality policies in Türkiye. Official statistics show that the number of women's cooperatives in Türkiye rose from 78 in 2017 to 669 in 2021, exceeding the overall rate of cooperativization (Şakırgün, 2024). This rapid rise shows that women's cooperatives should be reevaluated for their economic functions and roles in the context of gender equality, local development, and sustainability. The United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) have positioned women's empowerment and gender equality among global development priorities. Türkiye has also adopted the 2018–2030 Women's Empowerment Strategy Documents to align with these goals and has prioritized policies supporting women's cooperatives (Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2018; 2024).

Women's labor, especially in rural areas, has long been considered an invisible workforce (Chen, Sebstad & O'Connell, 1999; Dedeoğlu, 2010). In Türkiye, rural women's labor has primarily been limited to unpaid family work or informal employment, restricting their economic independence and social visibility. Numerous studies in the literature examine the economic outputs, production models, and governance issues of women's cooperatives. However, research on how these structures are evaluated in terms of women's social empowerment, daily resistance practices, or media representations remains limited, highlighting gap in understanding the multidimensional effects of women's cooperatives.

Women's cooperatives are not only economic production sites but also forms of social organization where social capital accumulation, a culture of solidarity, and leadership practices develop (Putnam, 1993; Kızıldağ, 2019). In particular, the participation of women from disadvantaged groups in production processes through cooperatives, the acquisition of sustainable skills, the dissemination of an entrepreneurial culture, and the attainment of public visibility play a transformative role in the gender regime. Thus, women's cooperatives are significant not only for their economic contributions but also as areas of social empowerment and transformation (Scott, 1985).

This study examines the transformation created by women's cooperatives at the individual, social, and institutional levels through media discourse, moving beyond the economically focused approaches in the existing literature. The television series *Hayallerinin Peşinde* (In Pursuit of Dreams), produced by *Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)* and focusing on women's cooperatives in the Central Anatolia Region, formed the basis of the research for this purpose. The episodes were analyzed in detail, and women's experiences were thematically classified and evaluated under five main themes: economic contributions, sustainable skills, social empowerment, support mechanisms, and resilience processes.

The research seeks to answer the following key questions:

- (1) What role do women's cooperatives play in women's economic independence and sustainable skills development?
- (2) How do these cooperatives contribute to the local labor force and regional economy?
- (3) How do these cooperatives shape women's social visibility, leadership, and representation?
- (4) To what extent do public institutions, development agencies, and civil society organizations support women's cooperatives?
- (5) How do women overcome challenges in the cooperative process, and what strategies do they use to bring about change?

Within this framework, the study examines women's cooperatives' economic and social contributions from an interdisciplinary perspective and reveals how these contributions are represented in media content. Thus, it aims to contribute to both the theoretical gap in the literature and current debates in the policy and practice fields.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundations of this study are shaped around women's labor, gender roles, sustainable development, and the theory of everyday resistance. Through cooperatives, women's organizations generate economic gains while facilitating social, cultural, and political transformation. Media content plays critical role in understanding how this transformation is communicated to the public, making certain themes and discourses visible. In this context, the research is framed by the following four theoretical foundations:

Women's labor and the social gender regime: Women's labor for a very long period has been characterized as an "auxiliary," "secondary," or "invisible" form of labor (Dedeoğlu, 2010; Kutay, 2022). In Türkiye, rural women's labor is often limited to unpaid family work or low-paid temporary jobs. Women's labor is predominantly situated in non-market or precarious sectors, including unpaid family work and informal employment (Adar et al., 2024; Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025). Lower female labor force participation rates compared to men are a key factor deepening poverty (Taş & Kazar, 2019; Adar et al., 2024). Kutay (2022) states a linear relationship between female poverty and unregistered employment, suggesting that unregistered work creates conditions in which women's labor is more easily exploited. Poverty and insecure working conditions often force women to accept unfavorable employment terms. Another example is unpaid labor in the form of housework, childcare, and elder care which limits the time and energy women can dedicate to t professional work (Akar, 2024). These conditions reflect the persistence of gender stereotypes and the gendered nature of labor (Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025), placing women in a disadvantaged economic position and increases their vulnerability (Kutay, 2022).

Women's cooperatives have the potential to disrupt this gender regime by formalizing invisible labor, transforming it into economic value, and increasing women's participation in decision-making processes (Karakuş, 2022). These cooperatives are creating positive change and transforming the lives of many women (Dedeoğlu, 2023; Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025; Özcengel & Geçgin, 2025). The most important of these are economic independence and income generation (Serinikli, 2019; Demircan Yıldırım, 2020; Değirmenci, 2023; Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025; Nuhoglu & Hamamcı, 2025); social security and improved working conditions (Taş & Kazar, 2019; Değirmenci, 2023; Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025); self-confidence and personal development (Duguid et al., 2015; Topaloğlu & Topaloğlu, 2017; Akgül, 2021; Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025); socialization and solidarity (Duguid et al., 2015; Değirmenci, 2023; Kurtuluş & Demircan Yıldırım, 2023; Özcengel & Geçgin, 2024); democratic management and decision-making (Duguid et al., 2015; Demircan Yıldırım, 2020; Yıldırım et al., 2021; Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025); and raising awareness (Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2025; Nuhoglu & Hamamcı, 2025).

Social capital: Cooperativism is a human-centered organizational model in which people voluntarily come together to achieve their basic economic, social, and cultural needs. Cooperatives are owned by their members and democratically governed (Köse, 2022; Durmaz & Baran, 2024). Therefore, they can be described not only as economic units producing goods and services but also as fields where social capital is generated (Kızıldağ, 2019). This model is based on fundamental values such as mutual aid, personal responsibility, democratic governance, equality, fairness, integrity, and unity. Cooperatives naturally create and utilize a substantial accumulation of social capital through these principles (Akar, 2024). Strengthening trust, reciprocity, and solidarity relationships increases

collective action capacity in rural areas (Putnam, 1994). Therefore, cooperativism provides both economic benefits and an important social capital tool by promoting social integration and supporting collective well-being (İrmiş & Boz, 2023; Akar, 2024).

Sustainable skills: Sustainable skills contain the knowledge, abilities, and practices that can sustain the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of the production process in the long term (UNESCO, 2017). In the context of women's cooperatives, these skills span a wide range, from food processing techniques to marketing strategies, handicrafts, and digital sales platforms (Özcengel & Geçgin, 2024). The development of these skills enables women not only to achieve economic independence but also actively contribute to reducing gender inequality and revitalizing local economies by fostering social inclusion, self-esteem, leadership, and collective action awareness (Karakuş, 2022; Nuhoglu & Hamamcı, 2025).

Everyday resistance/resistance theory: Scott's (1985) Theory of Everyday Resistance describes resistance sustained through everyday practices and symbolic actions rather than open conflict against patriarchal structures. Johansson and Vinthagen (2014) interpret these forms of resistance as an significant drivers of social change. Therefore, women's cooperatives serve as spaces of resistance that enable women to gain social empowerment through economic independence, public visibility, and collective organization. Women's economic independence through cooperatives, increased self-confidence, development of leadership skills, and the creation of a collective consciousness (Doğan & Atabay, 2022; Elçi, 2024) can be considered acts of resistance in and of themselves. Cooperatives offer solutions to problems affecting women's lives, addressing issues such as restrictive gender roles, economic dependency, and limited participation in leadership processes (Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2024).

2. METHOD

The research material consists of publicly available video recordings from the TRT program *Hayallerinin Peşinde* (In Pursuit of Dreams), focusing on women's cooperatives in the Central Anatolia Region (see Table 1). These episodes have been transcribed for analysis. The statements analyzed belong to women's cooperatives' presidents, members, and female employees. A purposive sampling method (Patton, 2002) was adopted in selecting the episodes taking into account both the filming location (city) and organizational structure. A total of 12 episodes were examined. During the analysis, each participant's statement was recorded along with the episode number and timestamp to ensure the reliability and traceability of the data set. The women's cooperatives operate in different fields such as food production, agriculture, and handicrafts.

Table 1: Information on the Cooperatives Included in the Study

No	Episodes	City	YouTube Publication Date	Type of Initiative	Organizational Structure	Duration (min)
1	1	Ankara	11.10.2022	Food Production/Agriculture	Cooperative	20:39
2	4	Aksaray	04.06.2022	Food Production/Agriculture	Cooperative	20:47
3	20	Ankara	01.4.2023	Food Production/Agriculture	Cooperative	21:44
4	23	Ankara	22.04.2023	Local Handicrafts (Textiles) Products	Cooperative	22:05
5	36	Ankara	19.02.2023	Food Production/Agriculture	Cooperative	22:50
6	45	Eskişehir	27.11.2023	Food Production/Agriculture and Local Handicrafts	Cooperative	24:09

				(Textiles) Products		
7	58	Nevşehir	30.05.2024	Food Production/Agriculture	Cooperative	20:39
8	59_1	Kayseri	13.05.2024	Local Handicrafts (Textiles) Products	Cooperative	21:53
9	59_2	Kayseri	13.05.2024	Local Handicrafts (Textiles) Products	Cooperative	22:50
10	60	Kayseri	29.05.2024	Local Handicrafts (Textiles, Leather, Jewelry) Products	Cooperative	25:20
11	75	Ankara	23.11.2024	Food Production/Agriculture	Cooperative	20:57
12	91	Ankara	25.05.2025	Food Production/Agriculture	Cooperative	20:15

A directed content analysis approach was adopted for the data analysis (Humble, 2009). Participants' conversations were transcribed into text with time stamps and reviewed several times to understand the overall context and repeating patterns. Subsequently, the texts were reread based on the main themes created from the literature and research questions, and meaningful data units were coded according to these themes. Subthemes derived from the data were created during the coding process. Thus, the pre-determined (main themes) and field-derived (subthemes) dimensions were identified. Finally, participant statements were classified according to the main theme-subtheme framework, and recurring patterns were identified, quantified, and presented in tables. This method enabled the use of qualitative and quantitative data, facilitating a systematic interpretation of the findings.

Once coding was complete, another researcher checked the codes, compared them with the initial findings, and resolved any inconsistencies to reach a consensus. In addition, the findings were made more transparent by including direct quotes from participants.

3. FINDINGS

This study adopted a directed content analysis approach for data analysis (Humble, 2009). The five main themes identified based on the research question and relevant literature, as well as the sub-themes that emerged during the coding process, are presented below with their frequency and percentage of occurrence in the texts and sample statements representing these themes.

3.1 Sustainable Skills

Sustainable skills cover the knowledge and practices developed by women in cooperative activities in areas such as production, financial management, organization, and environmental awareness. This theme (see Table 2) demonstrates the transfer and continuity of skills contributing to the economy and sustainable development.

Table 2: Sustainable Skills

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-Sustainable Skills	Technical production skills	46	40,71
	Digital skills	2	1,77
	Financial literacy	22	19,47
	Leadership and organization	29	25,66
	Environmental awareness	14	12,39
	Total	113	100,00

Technical production skills refer to the traditional or technical knowledge and practices of cooperative workers related to production. This theme was the most frequently repeated finding within the main theme of sustainable skills, which was mentioned 46 times (40.71%). Women particularly mentioned their experience in food and local product production.

As an example of this situation,

- *"We started producing bulgur, and we are producing tons of it"* (Episode 36, 32:48) and
- The phrase *"Famous for its apples... we produce natural apple cider vinegar"* (Episode 75, 40:29) can be shown.

Digital skills refer to the use of social media and digital tools in women's cooperatives, for activities such as information gathering, research, promotion, and e-commerce sales. This theme was appeared only twice across all content and was the least emphasized among the themes.

Examples representing this theme are as follows:

- *"We started e-commerce sales two months after our establishment... Our e-commerce sales are now on par with our regular wholesale sales"* (Episode 20, 38:10) and
- *"We posted our products on social media, received orders, and shipped them all over Türkiye and the world"* (Episode 59, 19:18) can be cited as examples.

Financial literacy refers to women gaining financial awareness, attitudes, and behaviors during the cooperative process. In this context, women actively participate in cost accounting, budgeting, and profit and loss management.

For example,

- *"You earn it with your own labor... this is my money, I earned it myself, it's my sweat and tears"* (Episode 36, 43:00) and
- *"We registered with 100 lira... now we've reached 100,000 in turnover... we've reached 1 million in turnover"* (Episode 59, 13:49) reflect this situation.

Leadership and organizational skills refer to assuming roles in women's cooperatives, participating in decision-making processes, and fostering egalitarian structures. This was the second most frequently mentioned theme (25.66%) among women. It is observed that women take on active responsibility in organizational processes, assume leadership roles, and adopt an egalitarian approach.

For example,

- "In 2007, we established the Ayaş Akkaya Agricultural Development Cooperative with 11 female farmers" (Episode 1, 7:38) and
- "Sure, I'm the president of the cooperative, but there's no hierarchy among us; we're all equal" (Episode 58, 31:50) illustrate this situation.

Environmental awareness refers to the care and sensitivity shown in the production processes of cooperatives. Women's cooperatives produce without harming nature, operate recycling processes, take care to use local resources, and demonstrate a sustainable attitude.

The following statements can be given as examples of the sensitivity of cooperatives:

- "The reason we established this factory was to transform discarded items (small, damaged, or unusable products)" (Episode 1, 10:04).
- "Our solar panels... we generate electricity from them" (Episode 36, 34:58). These statements can be presented as representative of the environmental awareness of women's cooperatives.

3.2 Contribution to the Local Workforce and Regional Economy

Women's participation in economic life through the establishment of cooperatives and their contributions to the regional economy are grouped under this main theme (see Table 3).

Table 3: Contribution to the Local Workforce and Regional Economy

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
2- Contribution to the Local Workforce and Regional Economy	Women's employment	21	22,83
	Promoting a culture of entrepreneurship,	3	3,26
	Connection with local markets	17	18,48
	Occupational transformation	14	15,22
	Value-added production	14	15,22
	Use of local raw materials	11	11,96
	Economic diversification	12	13,04
	Total	92	100,00

Women's employment refers to participation in production and income-generating activities through cooperatives. This was one of the most emphasized sub-themes in the program, accounting for 22.83% of the total. It can be seen that women are included in economic life through employment and that broad participation at the village level has been achieved/is being targeted.

The statements,

- "We have about 250 women who work with the cooperative." (Episode 23, 44:03) and,
- "My dream is for this cooperative to be able to provide jobs to almost every woman in the village" (Episode 60, 20:14) can be cited as supporting evidence for this situation.

Promoting a culture of entrepreneurship, setting an example for establishing new cooperatives, partnerships, and ventures, and inspiring others to take action. According to participants' statements, this theme was mentioned three times (3.26%).

For example, the statements,

- *"First they came to work, then... we told them to become partners, they became partners, and now they have their own business"* (Episode 20, 34:33) and
- *"There were associations that wanted to be established after us, for example, these are positive developments, and it is commendable to serve as a role model"* (Episode 60, 22:57) exemplifies this situation.

Connection with local markets refers to the availability of products in local markets and points of sale. This theme was highlighted 17 times (18.48%).

For example,

- *"We started setting up stalls at all the society markets that opened in Ankara"* (Episode 20, 30:00) and
- *"Our products are now on the shelves in markets, pickles and bulgur"* (Episode 75, 33:42) these statements show the connection women have established with the markets.

Occupational transformation reflects women's transition from traditional domestic roles to those of producers or employees. According to the findings, this theme was mentioned 14 times (15.22%).

One participant illustrated this transformation with the words,

- *"My life, which began as a laborer or housewife, continued with the cooperative president"* (Episode 1, 13:50), while another described a similar situation with the words,
- *"My sister started working in the cooperative for the first time in her life at the age of 63"* (Episode 58, 43:40).

Value-added production is related to the branding or geographical indication process of local products. This theme was identified 14 times (15.22%).

For example, the following statements demonstrate the contribution of cooperatives to the region:

- *"We have filed our trademark application and received our trademark registration"* (Episode 1, 14:29) and
- *"Enhancing the value of geographically indicated Nallıhan Needle Lace as a High-Value Product"* (Episode 23, 24:11).

The use of local raw materials refers to the use of products sourced from the region in the production process. This theme was mentioned 11 times (11.96%).

For example,

- *"Ayaş tomatoes... the soil makes them taste so good"* (Episode 1, 10:15) and
- *"We use fruit grown by my parents"* (Episode 75, 41:42) are examples that reflect this approach.

The sub-theme of economic diversification is related to providing alternative sources of income for the region. In addition to existing local products, cooperative workers contribute to the regional economy with new products. This theme was mentioned 12 times (13.04%).

For example,

- one participant said, *"We decided to make vegan and gluten-free products"* (Episode 20, 36:47),

- while another said, *"We created a different field with the production of horse equipment"* (Episode 45, 14:09), providing an example of this economic diversification.

3.3 Social Empowerment and Representation

The third theme of the study, social empowerment and representation (see Table 4), includes aspects such as the social visibility women gained through their involvement in cooperatives, the formation/adoption of a culture of solidarity, the development of self-confidence, the transformation of their social roles, and their assumption of leadership roles.

Table 4: Social Empowerment and Representation

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
3- Social Empowerment and Representation	Social visibility	13	12,87
	Culture of solidarity	20	19,80
	Increased self-confidence	16	15,84
	Social role transformation	14	13,86
	Becoming a role model	11	10,89
	Overcoming gender stereotypes	13	12,87
	Women's leadership	14	13,86
	Total	101	100

Social visibility refers to women's participation in the public sphere. This sub-theme was mentioned 13 times (12.87%).

For example,

- one participant emphasized the official venues where women were invited, saying, *"We are invited to places where our minister, governor, and mayor are present"* (Episode 20, 40:15).
- Similarly, another participant said, *"My identity has changed. I mean, you can go to a district governor... and call him 'my boss'"* (Episode 91, 43:08), showing the change in social representation.

The culture of solidarity refers to cooperation, support, and collective power among women. Statements related to the culture of solidarity were frequently emphasized (20 times, 19.80%) by women in cooperatives.

One of the women described the process as follows:

- *"I was supporting Serpil when she fell, and Serpil was supporting me when I fell"* (Episode 20, 42:18).

In another example,

- *"We learned to say 'we' rather than 'I' ... we love each other more"* (Episode 60, 19:39) shows that the culture of solidarity has been internalized.

Increased self-confidence is related to women recognizing their own power and was emphasized 16 times (15.84%).

- Participants expressed their newly gained confidence with the words, *"We now have the strength to say, 'I can do this job too. I can do it too'"* (Episode 36, 25:00).
- Similarly, the statement, *"I used to be someone who couldn't speak in front of people and whose palms would sweat, but now I'm teaching"* (Episode 60, 25:34) reflects this change.

Social role transformation refers to women transitioning from the role of housewife to that of producer or decision-maker. This theme was highlighted 14 times (13.86%).

For example,

- One participant emphasized the transformation, saying, *"Life began with being a laborer or a housewife and continued with becoming the president of a cooperative"* (Episode 1, 13:50).
- Another participant expressed this role change by saying, *"First we were at home... now we are doing it, we are earning"* (Episode 59, 15:44).

Being a role model reflects situations of inspiring other women. This sub-theme was mentioned 11 times (10.89%).

- The statement, *"A woman who can serve as a role model for women living in different villages, towns, and small cities"* (Episode 1, 0:38) highlights the importance of role models at the individual level, while
- *"After us, other associations were established, for example, these are good things, being a role model is good"* (Episode 60, 22:57) shows the collective dimension of this effect.

Overcoming gender stereotypes refers to women standing up against the perception that *"women cannot do it."* This sub-theme was repeated 13 times (12.87%).

- Participants referred to the prejudices at the beginning of the process with the words, *"We couldn't even get a little support from our spouses; they said, 'You can't do it, you won't be able to do it'"* (Episode 1, 0:50).
- In another example, the statement, *"The men didn't accept it and said they wouldn't hand it over... So we said, 'Then let's set up a separate cooperative'"* (Episode 91, 29:22) shows that these stereotypes have been overcome.

Women's leadership refers to the assumption of management and leadership roles in cooperatives. This sub-theme was mentioned 14 times (13.86%).

For example,

- One participant conveyed the leadership position he had attained by saying, *"I am the chairman of the board"* (Episode 20, 32:54).
- Another participant emphasized female leadership, saying, *"She discovered the power of collaborative production and embarked on an exciting journey by taking on the presidency of the cooperative she founded"* (Episode 58, 26:21).

3.4 Support Mechanisms and Institutions

This main theme encompasses all the institutional and individual support and support mechanisms that women's cooperatives have benefited from throughout the entire process, from the start of their activities to their development and continuation (see Table 5). In addition to public institutions' financial and logistical support, civil society organizations and family support have also been important pillars in women's production and organization processes.

Table 5: Support Mechanisms and Institutions

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
4- Support Mechanisms and Institutions	Support from the governor's office/municipality	15	38,46
	Contribution from the Development Agency	8	20,51
	NGO partnerships	3	7,69
	Family support	13	33,33
	Total	39	100

Support from the governor's office/municipality refers to free workshops, marketplaces, or logistical support provided to women's cooperatives by local governments and public institutions (governor's office, district governor's office, municipality, village administration). There are 15 (38.46%) statements regarding the support provided by these institutions.

Examples of these statements include:

- One of the participants stated the support of official institutions by saying, *"Our project was carried out with the support of the Special Provincial Administration and the support of the Governorship"* (Episode 1, 10:52).
- In another example, the statement, *"The district governor said, 'Let me be your first customer, I'll place an order for 100 pieces'"* (Episode 59, 13:25) shows that this support is also a symbolic motivational tool for cooperatives.

The Development Agency strengthens women's cooperatives through institutional contributions such as technical consulting, training, feasibility studies, and machinery and equipment support. This sub-theme was mentioned 8 times (20.51%).

For example,

- One of the participants explained this contribution by saying, *"This year, we submitted a project to the Ankara Development Agency, and our project was accepted... we will receive machinery and equipment support"* (Episode 1, 16:46).
- Similarly, the statement, *"We received 250,000 lira in machinery support from the project... It was a project prepared by the Oran Development Agency and YIKOB"* (Episode 59, 17:23) demonstrates the concrete support provided by development agencies.

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) partnerships refer to civil society organizations that provide training, mentoring, trade fair participation, logistics, or sales network support to women's cooperatives. This sub-theme was mentioned only three times (7.69%).

- One participant expressed the support of NGOs for events, saying, *"We go to fairs, we go to conferences"* (Episode 36, 35:14).
- Another participant pointed out the importance of individual academic/mentoring support, saying, *"Professor Üstün Sönmez provided tremendous support in this regard"* (Episode 45, 12:12).

Family support refers to the moral and practical support women receive from family members (spouse, mother, father, or children) during the cooperative formation process. This theme was mentioned 13 times (33.33%).

Looking at examples of this important support,

- One participant emphasized the fundamental role of family support, saying, *"My mother was always there for us in every aspect of our lives"* (Episode 1, 3:06).
- Another participant expressed the importance of spousal support in terms of motivation and continuity, saying, *"My wife has always been there for me. She trusts me and knows what I will do"* (Episode 59, 41:45).

3.5 Resistance and Transformation

This main theme addresses women's attempts to begin employment, continue in production, gain new technical and institutional expertise, and empower themselves via solidarity, despite the challenges of forming cooperatives (see Table 6). This theme reveals that women have become more resilient by transforming themselves within a collective structure, beyond their individual efforts.

Table 6: Resistance and Transformation

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
5- Resistance and Transformation	Determination not to give up	24	36,36
	Technical transformation	13	19,70
	Organizational learning	13	19,70
	Empowerment through cooperatives	16	24,24
	Total	66	100

Determination not to give up: This sub-theme, which refers to persevering despite difficulties, was mentioned 24 times (36.36%).

- One participant's statement reveals this situation with the following words: *"Cooperatives are not easy, you have to put in the work, you won't give up, and you keep going without giving up"* (Episode 58, 26:50).
- In another example, this determination is emphasized with the words, *"We received a lot of criticism, but we never listened... They said we couldn't do it, but we showed we could do it"* (Episode 59, 15:39).

Technical transformation, technical transformation, in which women acquire technical knowledge and skills in production processes, is grouped under this sub-theme (13 statements, 19.70%).

- This situation was reflected in a conversation as follows: *"She started working like a mechanical engineer"* (Episode 1, 13:55).
- In another statement, technological transformation is clearly emphasized: *"We started to industrialize... we needed to reduce human labor and produce more products"* (Episode 4, 12:38).

Organizational learning, along with cooperativism, and the organizational knowledge and experiences acquired by women are included in this sub-theme (13 statements, 19.70%).

- One participant described the process as follows: *"We received cooperative training and mentoring training"* (Episode 23, 43:30).

- In another account, the institutional dimension of the learning process is expressed as follows: *"We took a course at the municipality for about a month and a half... then we established a cooperative"* (Episode 58, 31:33).

Empowerment through cooperatives: Women's resilience gained through collective solidarity stood out under this sub-theme (16 statements, 24.24%).

- One participant explains this collective empowerment as follows: *"We learned to say 'we' rather than 'I'... we saw that women could do something together"* (Episode 60, 19:39).
- Another participant emphasizes that the cooperative is not only a place of production but also a place of solidarity: *"The cooperative was not only a union that produced goods but also a house of solidarity"* (Episode 91, 38:46).

4. DISCUSSION

This research on women's cooperatives reveals a multi-layered transformation process in economic, social, institutional, and cultural dimensions. The findings show that women are empowered in the production process and in different areas, such as developing self-confidence, gaining social visibility, creating a culture of solidarity, and showing resistance. In this respect, cooperatives stand out as areas where women's labor is made visible, local development is supported, and the gender regime is renegotiated.

The important findings obtained in the study were discussed within the framework of five main themes and evaluated in comparison with the existing literature.

Sustainable skills developed through women's cooperatives play an important and transformative role in rural development. This role contributes to individual and societal development by bringing about comprehensive improvements in women's economic, social, and cultural lives. The findings that emerge in this theme are consistent with discussions in the literature regarding the transformative role of women's labor in rural development (Kurtuluş & Demircan Yıldırım, 2022; Sayın, 2025). Research data indicates that women emphasize their technical production skills the most. Women have highlighted their experience and knowledge in producing food and local products.

This finding reveals that women in rural areas have integrated traditional production practices with contemporary cooperative structures (Başaran & Irmak, 2022). Considering that one of the most significant problems for women is gaining economic freedom, the prominence of the theme of financial literacy in the findings shows that women have taken an active role in financial decision-making and management processes alongside the cooperative process. Women's emphasis on budgeting, profit and loss accounting, and capital accumulation reveals that cooperatives provide women with both production and economic autonomy. This finding supports assessments in the literature regarding women's economic empowerment and increased financial awareness (Adar & Dedeoğlu, 2023; Özcengel & Geçgin, 2025). Another noteworthy point in sustainable skills is the theme of environmental awareness. It is observed that women are tending toward methods that do not harm nature in production processes. Examples such as recycling waste products or using renewable energy demonstrate that women's cooperatives have added an environmental dimension to their sustainability vision. This finding shows that cooperatives play a role not only in economic development but also in the context of environmental sustainability (Öcal & Ercoskun, 2021; Kutay, 2022). However, it is observed that there are very few references to digital skills. This situation shows that digital skills have not yet gained sufficient ground in cooperatives – they have not become widespread. Although there are sales or e-commerce initiatives on social media, the fact that participants mention only a limited number of digital skills shows that digital transformation is an

important area that needs to be developed. Similarly, studies (Demirkol, 2022; Topuz & Ege, 2024) indicate a demand for addressing the lack of education in developing women's digital skills and effectively using digital platforms. Concerns about balancing household and family responsibilities with work requirements (Kutay, 2022; Gürsoy, 2022), financial constraints, and infrastructure issues (Kızıldaş & Gönüldaş, 2011) emerge as other barriers to acquiring digital skills.

Women's cooperatives contribute to women's economic life as individuals and emerge as important actors in the local labor market and regional economy (Aldırmaz Akkaya, 2018). Women's cooperatives play a strategic role in regional development through elements such as women's participation in employment, connections with local markets, and economic diversification (Taş & Kazar, 2019; Özcengel & Geçgin, 2025). The valuation of women's labor, especially in rural areas, is a critical gain in economic and social sustainability (Kutay, 2022). An important finding that stands out here is that women, through cooperatives, not only offer existing products to the market but also diversify the local economy with value-added production and innovative ventures. For example, the development of vegan and gluten-free products or geographically indicated products demonstrates that women have become innovative actors in production. This finding supports studies that reveal that women's cooperatives offer alternative and sustainable contributions to regional development (Karakuş, 2022; Demircan Yıldırım, 2020). Thus, women not only participate in the labor market but also play a leading role in transforming the local economy.

Cooperatives have become an important tool for social empowerment by enabling women to become visible in the social sphere (as managers, partners, members, leaders, and female employees), gain self-confidence, and develop a culture of solidarity. Women's representation in the public sphere, their assumption of leadership roles, and their role as role models demonstrate that lasting changes in the gender regime are possible (Dedeoğlu, 2023; Demircan Yıldırım & Şenkal, 2024).

Another striking finding in this theme is that women challenge the perception that "women cannot do it" by overcoming gender stereotypes. Women becoming role models in their villages or regions has created a domino effect that has inspired other women to act. This is consistent with findings in the literature showing that women's cooperatives develop socialization, solidarity, and leadership skills (Duguid et al., 2015; Demircan Yıldırım, 2020). Therefore, women's cooperatives can be seen as a tool for individual and collective transformation in the context of social empowerment and representation.

The study's findings reveal that institutional and individual support are critical for the sustainability of women's cooperatives. Logistical support provided by provincial governments and municipalities, training and equipment contributions from development agencies, NGO partnerships, and family support have formed the fundamental pillars of support for women in their production processes (İrmiş & Boz, 2023; Nuhoğlu & Hamamcı, 2025). It has been observed that family support (spouse, mother, children) is as important as the support provided by official institutions. The fact that family support, which is evaluated chiefly at a secondary level in the literature, has come to the fore to such an extent shows that the immediate environment plays a decisive role in women's entrepreneurial experience (Nuhoğlu & Hamamcı, 2025). Conversely, family attitudes that discourage women's desire to work may also emerge in some cases. For example, "We couldn't even get a little support from our spouses. You can't do it, you can't do it" (Episode 1, 0:50). Despite the difficulties women encounter in the process of cooperativization, their determination not to give up, technical learning processes, and institutional development have enabled them to become more resilient actors. Women's struggle against the perception that "you cannot do it" through production, organization, and leadership can be considered an example of everyday forms of resistance (Scott, 1985; Johansson &

Vinhagen, 2014). These findings show that cooperatives are not only an economic structure but also an area of transformation and resistance.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to reveal the economic and social functions of women's cooperatives, understand the transformation experienced by women in the context of gender roles, and analyze how this transformation is represented through media content. The results show that women's cooperatives have created multi-layered effects at the individual and social levels. The study's first finding is that women's cooperatives provide women with economic independence by making invisible labor visible. Women's participation in production is not only a process of earning income, but also brings with it social security, formal employment, and the acquisition of sustainable skills. Thus, women's labor has become an element that gains value in the market, is recorded, and contributes to rural development. Secondly, it has been seen that cooperatives play a strategic role in terms of local labor and the regional economy. The branding of local products, geographical indication initiatives, and digital sales opportunities demonstrate that women have become producers and entrepreneurial actors. This situation increases the importance of cooperatives in terms of ensuring the sustainability of local development. Thirdly, the research has revealed that women's cooperatives strongly contribute to social empowerment and representation. Women's gain in self-confidence, social visibility, adoption of a culture of solidarity, and orientation toward leadership roles demonstrate that cooperatives have a transformative effect on the social gender regime. Fourthly, the findings on support mechanisms show that women's cooperatives benefit significantly from public institutions and development agencies, but civil society collaborations remain limited. This situation indicates that NGO support needs to be developed to increase cooperatives' institutional resilience. Finally, it has been observed that women have developed resilience through collective solidarity, despite the difficulties they face in the cooperative process. Acquiring technical skills, participating in institutional learning processes, and empowerment through cooperatives have revealed that women have transformed at both the individual and societal levels.

Limitations of the Study:

The limited availability of data on women's cooperatives operating in the Central Anatolia region may not reflect the full diversity and contextual dynamics of women's cooperatives across Türkiye. The fact that the data source is limited to media representations and does not include direct interviews with individuals is a factor that negatively affects the depth of the research. Similarly, the fact that no direct observations could be made about the internal structures of cooperatives, their governance processes, or power relations among women based on statements reflected in the media highlights the study's limitations.

Future Research:

For future studies, a comparative analysis of the economic, social, and cultural impacts of women's cooperatives operating in different regions of Türkiye could make important contributions to the literature on cooperatives.

Compliance with Ethical Standard

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any third parties or institutions. If a conflict of interest arises, it will be disclosed and appropriately resolved. The signed author contribution declaration form is included in the article submission files.

Ethics Committee Approval: There is no need for ethics committee approval in this article, the wet signed consent form stating that the ethics committee decision is not required has been added to the article process files on the system.

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