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Charitable and Cultural-Educational Initiatives of Cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine (1914–1918)

Abstract

The relevance of the study lies in the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the social role of cooperation under wartime crisis conditions, as well as in the insufficient historiographical coverage of its charitable and cultural-educational dimensions. The central problem addressed in the article is the fragmentary treatment of the humanitarian mission of cooperatives, which has long remained secondary to analyses of their economic and organisational functions. The novelty of the study consists in examining the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War not as auxiliary phenomena, but as an integral component of the cooperative movement's social mission; it also lies in the article's regional focus, which makes it possible to reconstruct local forms of assistance and enlightenment with greater precision. The subject of the study is the charitable and educational activities of the cooperative organisations of Left-Bank Ukraine, together with the actions of their boards, activists, members, and related public initiatives. The object of the study is the cooperative movement of Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War. The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the forms, directions, and significance of the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives under wartime conditions. The methodological framework is based on the principles of historicism and objectivity and combines analytical, synthetic, generalising, systematising, comparative-historical, problem-chronological, statistical, and source-critical methods. The study draws in a generalised manner on the works of V. Polovets, S. Babenko, I. Vytanovych, S. Prokopovich, A. Merkulov, A. Orlov, and A. Minin, as well as on wartime cooperative periodicals, particularly *Khliborob* and *Nasha Kooperatsiia*. The article demonstrates that wartime economic disruption, price instability, mobilisation, and refugee flows transformed cooperatives from primarily economic organisations into important social institutions. It establishes that their charitable work embraced support for the families of mobilised soldiers, concessional credit, medical aid, assistance to refugees, and public mutual-aid campaigns, while their educational work included lectures, cooperative courses, cultural initiatives, and support for Ukrainian-language schooling. The author concludes that cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine performed a genuinely multifunctional role during the First World War, combining economic activity with social support and cultural-educational mobilisation, and that they became significant centres of solidarity, civic consolidation, and national self-awareness. At the same time, the topic remains open to further interdisciplinary research based on a broader source base and regional archival materials.

Keywords: cooperative movement, Left-Bank Ukraine, First World War, charitable activity, cultural-educational activity, wartime social support, families of mobilised soldiers, refugees, cooperative press, Ukrainian-language education.

Introduction

The cooperative movement in Ukraine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries became one of the most important factors in the social-economic modernisation of society. It acquired particular significance during the First World War (1914–1918), when the worsening economic crisis, rising prices, the mobilisation of the able-bodied male population, and the emergence of a significant number of refugees posed new challenges to the community. Under these conditions, cooperatives acted not only as economic structures, but also as centres of charity and enlightenment.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the need for a comprehensive understanding of the social role of cooperation under the crisis conditions of wartime, as well as by the insufficient coverage in historiography of the charitable and cultural-educational aspects of its activities. Despite the existence of fundamental works on the history of the cooperative movement (*Babenko, 1995; Polovets, 1996; Vytanovych, 1964*), the issue of a systematic analysis of the charitable and educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the war remains only fragmentarily researched.

The novelty of the study topic lies in the fact that the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War are examined not as secondary or auxiliary phenomena, but as an integral dimension of the cooperative movement's social mission. In contrast to the dominant historiographical focus on the economic and organisational development of cooperatives, this study concentrates on their contribution to public support, social solidarity, and the preservation of community stability under wartime conditions. Such an approach makes it possible to reveal the multifunctional nature of cooperative institutions in a period of acute social disruption. It also broadens the scholarly understanding of cooperation as a mechanism not only of economic self-help, but also of civic adaptation to crisis.

A further element of novelty consists in the regional focus on Left-Bank Ukraine, which enables a more precise reconstruction of local forms of cooperative assistance and educational work in the context of the war of 1914–1918. The study systematises disparate historiographical observations and combines them into a coherent analytical framework centred on the main directions, forms, and social significance of charitable and enlightenment-oriented activity. In this way, it highlights the role of cooperatives in supporting vulnerable groups, disseminating practical knowledge, and strengthening collective resilience. The research therefore contributes to a more comprehensive interpretation of the cooperative movement in Ukrainian history and expands the existing scholarly discourse on wartime social institutions.

The subjects of the study are the cooperative organisations of Left-Bank Ukraine that operated during the First World War, as well as their boards, activists, members, and associated public initiatives involved in charitable and educational work. Particular attention is paid to those institutional and social actors who organised assistance for the families of mobilised men, refugees, and other vulnerable groups, and who promoted lectures, courses, publications, and other forms of public enlightenment. Through the study of their activities, it becomes possible to identify the practical mechanisms through which cooperatives responded to wartime challenges and influenced the consolidation of society.

The object of the study is the cooperative movement of Left-Bank Ukraine during the years of the First World War. The subject of the study is the charitable and educational activities of the region's cooperative organisations.

The study aims a comprehensive analysis of the forms, directions, and significance of the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine under wartime conditions.

To achieve this purpose, the following objectives have been set:

- characterise the historiographical state of the problem;
- analyse the economic conditions of cooperative activity in 1914–1918;
- identify the main directions of charitable assistance;
- examine the forms of educational activity;
- clarify the role of cooperatives in the consolidation of society.

The theoretical significance of the study lies in its contribution to the expansion of scholarly understanding of the cooperative movement as a multidimensional historical phenomenon that cannot be reduced solely to its economic functions. By focusing on the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War, the article refines existing interpretations of cooperation as a form of social organisation, civic solidarity, and collective adaptation under crisis conditions. The research also deepens the historiography of Ukrainian cooperation by integrating social, cultural, and institutional perspectives into a single analytical framework. In this way, it helps to clarify the place of cooperatives within the broader history of wartime society, local self-organisation, and the development of public initiative in Ukraine.

The practical significance of the study is determined by the possibility of using its findings in further historical, regional, and interdisciplinary research on the social experience of wartime communities. The materials and conclusions of the article may be applied in university teaching, particularly in courses on the history of Ukraine, the history of the cooperative movement, social history, and the history of civic institutions. They may also be of value for local historians, museum specialists, archivists, and researchers working with regional documentary collections related to the First World War. In addition, the study may serve as a conceptual basis for the further systematisation of archival sources, the preparation of academic publications, and the development of broader comparative studies on charitable and educational practices in periods of social upheaval.

The materials of the research are intended for historians, specialists in Ukrainian studies, researchers of the cooperative movement, and scholars working in the fields of social and economic history, cultural history, and the history of education. They may also be useful to sociologists, political scientists, local historians, archivists, university teachers, postgraduate students, and all those interested in the social practices of mutual aid and community self-organisation in times of crisis. In addition, the findings of the study may be applied in academic teaching, in the preparation of specialised courses on the history of Ukraine and cooperation, and in further interdisciplinary research on wartime society.

Methods

The methodological framework of this study is grounded in the principles of historicism and objectivity and is determined by the specific character of the research topic, namely the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War. The study is based on an integrated methodological approach that makes it possible to examine cooperative organisations not only as economic institutions, but also as important actors in the social and cultural life of wartime society. Given the complexity of the subject, the research combines general scientific principles with special historical methods in

order to reconstruct the main forms, directions, and significance of cooperative activity under conditions of military, economic, and social crisis. Such a methodological combination ensures a consistent analysis of both the historical context and the concrete manifestations of cooperative initiatives in 1914–1918.

At the general scientific level, the analytical method has been used to distinguish the principal components of the research problem and to examine them in a differentiated manner. Through analysis, the study separates the economic, charitable, and cultural-educational dimensions of cooperative activity and considers each of them as a distinct yet interconnected element of wartime social practice. This method has made it possible to identify the main directions of assistance provided by cooperatives, the forms of their educational work, and the conditions under which these activities acquired particular social significance. Analytical decomposition has also supported a clearer interpretation of the relationship between cooperative institutions and the broader social challenges of the First World War. This method has been applied in accordance with the principles of historicism and objectivity, which require the examined phenomena to be interpreted within their concrete historical context and without one-sided evaluation.

The method of synthesis has been employed to combine individual observations, facts, and thematic strands into a coherent interpretation of the role of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the war. While analysis allows separate aspects of cooperative practice to be examined in detail, synthesis makes it possible to integrate them into a broader understanding of cooperation as a multifunctional social institution. In the present study, this method has been used to connect evidence concerning charitable assistance, public support, enlightenment work, and organisational activity into a unified picture of cooperative participation in wartime society. As a result, cooperatives are interpreted not merely as economic structures, but as institutions that simultaneously fulfilled social, cultural, and community-consolidating functions. The synthetic approach therefore ensures the internal coherence of the research and strengthens the explanatory value of the conclusions.

The method of generalisation has been applied to move from individual examples and scattered historical evidence to broader scholarly conclusions. Since the available material on the charitable and educational activities of cooperatives is often fragmentary, generalisation is necessary for identifying recurring tendencies, typical forms of assistance, and common organisational features. In this study, the method has been used to formulate conclusions about the social significance of cooperatives, their contribution to public solidarity, and their role in supporting vulnerable groups during wartime. It has also allowed the research to transcend isolated cases and to present the activities of cooperative organisations as part of a wider historical process affecting the region as a whole. In methodological terms, generalisation has served as an important bridge between empirical evidence and historical interpretation.

Systematisation has been used to arrange the collected material according to a clear internal structure corresponding to the aim and objectives of the article. This method presupposes the ordering of facts, historiographical positions, and source materials into logically related thematic groups, which in the present research include economic conditions, charitable initiatives, cultural-educational practices, and the social role of cooperatives. By means of systematisation, the study avoids descriptive fragmentation and presents the material in a way that reveals the internal links between different forms of cooperative activity. This approach has been particularly important for structuring the discussion of wartime challenges and the institutional responses developed by cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine. In practical terms, systematisation ensures the clarity of the research design and the consistency of the article's argumentation.

Among the special historical methods employed in the study, the comparative-historical method occupies an important place. Its essence lies in identifying similarities and differences between historical phenomena, institutional practices, and forms of social behaviour in order to determine their specific features and broader historical significance. In this research, the method has been used to compare different manifestations of cooperative activity and to determine how charitable and educational initiatives functioned within the wider development of the cooperative movement during the First World War. It has also made it possible to relate the experience of Left-Bank Ukraine to more general tendencies in the history of cooperation and wartime social adaptation. Through such comparison, the article clarifies the distinctive features of regional cooperative practice and its contribution to the consolidation of society.

The problem-chronological method has been used to organise the research material according to both thematic priorities and temporal development. This method is especially valuable in historical studies because it enables the scholar to trace how a specific problem evolves over time and under changing conditions. In the present article, it has been applied to examine the charitable and cultural-educational work of cooperatives in relation to the successive stages of the war period from 1914 to 1918. Such an approach allows the study to show not only the principal forms of cooperative activity, but also their transformation in response to intensifying economic hardship, mobilisation, refugee movements, and growing social instability. The method therefore ensures that the research reflects both the thematic complexity and the temporal dynamics of the investigated phenomenon.

The statistical method has been employed to the extent permitted by the available historical material and is aimed at identifying quantitative tendencies in cooperative practice. In historical research, this method is used to process numerical indicators that help to reveal the scale, frequency, or proportional significance of particular phenomena. In this study, statistical reasoning has been applied in analysing data related to the material support of the population, the supply of essential goods, and other measurable aspects of cooperative assistance during wartime. Even where precise quantitative series are limited, the statistical method helps to substantiate broader conclusions regarding the intensity and social reach of cooperative initiatives. Its use strengthens the empirical basis of the article and complements qualitative historical interpretation with elements of measurable evaluation.

The source-critical method has played a fundamental role in assessing the available body of evidence and determining the informative potential of the materials used in the article. This method involves the examination of the origin, character, reliability, and limitations of historical sources and is indispensable for any balanced scholarly reconstruction of the past. In the present study, it has been used in working with pre-revolutionary writings on cooperation, materials from the cooperative press, and later generalising works on the history of Ukrainian cooperation. Such an approach makes it possible to distinguish between descriptive, normative, and interpretative layers within the source base and to avoid uncritical reliance on any single category of evidence. The source-critical method therefore ensures a more objective and methodologically consistent use of historiographical and documentary materials.

Thus, the chosen methodology ensures a comprehensive examination of the charitable and cultural-educational initiatives of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War. The combination of general scientific principles with special historical methods makes it possible to reconstruct the historical circumstances of cooperative activity, to identify its principal social functions, and to evaluate its contribution to community consolidation under wartime conditions. This methodological framework also provides the necessary basis for a balanced interpretation of the source material and for a substantiated analysis of cooperatives as

institutions that combined economic practice with social support and public enlightenment. In this way, the applied methods correspond fully to the aim and objectives of the study and support the overall internal coherence of the research.

Literature Review

The source base of the present study may be divided into three principal historiographical groups, each of which performs a distinct analytical function in the reconstruction of the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War. The first group consists of later synthetic works on the history of Ukrainian cooperation, represented by Polovets (1996), Babenko (1995), and Vytanovych (1964). The second group includes pre-revolutionary analytical and theoretical writings on cooperation, namely Totomiantz (1914), Prokopovich (1916), Merkulov (1915), Orlov (1916), and Minin (1915). The third group is formed by wartime cooperative periodicals and publicistic texts, above all *Khliborob* (1915) and *Nasha Kooperatsiia* (1916), which register the immediate language, priorities, and self-representation of the movement. Taken together, these materials make it possible to move from general history to wartime specificity, and from doctrine to practical social action. At the same time, the available historiography reveals a clear imbalance: the economic growth, institutional forms, and legal organisation of cooperation have been studied more thoroughly than its charitable and educational mission, as can be seen from the dominant emphases in Babenko (1995), Polovets (1996), and Vytanovych (1964). The present article therefore proceeds from the position that social assistance and enlightenment were not peripheral appendices to cooperative activity, but one of the central mechanisms through which cooperatives acquired public legitimacy in wartime society.

Polovets's monograph, *The Cooperative Movement in Left-Bank Ukraine (1861–1917)* (1996), occupies a key place in the historiography because it provides the closest regional framework for the present research. Its principal value lies in the fact that it reconstructs the institutional development of cooperation specifically in Left-Bank Ukraine rather than in the empire at large, thereby offering the territorial and historical coordinates within which wartime charitable initiatives can be interpreted. As a work focused on the *longue durée* of regional cooperative development, it is especially useful for identifying the pre-war foundations of those organisational networks that later enabled rapid mobilisation of assistance during the crisis of 1914–1918. In methodological terms, Polovets (1996) is used in this article as a contextualising study that clarifies the scale, maturity, and historical peculiarities of the cooperative movement in the region under examination. At the same time, the monograph is less directly concerned with charity and cultural-educational work as independent analytical categories. For this reason, it is read here not as a finished explanation of wartime cooperative social practice, but as a regional baseline from which the specifically humanitarian functions of cooperatives may be further developed. Thus, Polovets (1996) provides the indispensable spatial and institutional foundation of the article, while the present study extends that regional perspective into the sphere of social history.

A broader synthetic horizon is supplied by Babenko's *History of the Cooperative Movement* (1995) and Vytanovych's *History of the Ukrainian Cooperative Movement* (1964), yet these two works contribute to the study in different ways. Babenko (1995) is important because it systematises the principal organisational forms, legal principles, and stages of cooperative development, thereby enabling the present article to situate wartime charity within the institutional logic of the movement as a whole. It is particularly useful where the study needs to distinguish between types of cooperatives and to relate social initiatives to the general organisational architecture of the

cooperative sector. Vytanovych (1964), by contrast, is valuable for tracing the ideological evolution of Ukrainian cooperation and for drawing attention to the broader national and civic dimensions of cooperative work. In the context of this article, Vytanovych's (1964) synthesis is especially relevant for interpreting educational activity not merely as technical instruction, but as a vehicle of collective self-awareness and, in some circumstances, national consolidation. This perspective is directly important for the present study, which links cooperative lectures, courses, and support for Ukrainian-language schooling with wider processes of social and cultural mobilisation during the war. Both Babenko (1995) and Vytanovych (1964), however, devote comparatively limited attention to wartime charity as a distinct field of cooperative action, and it is precisely this lacuna that the present article seeks to address by bringing the social-humanitarian dimension to the centre of analysis.

The pre-revolutionary theoretical layer of the source base is represented, first of all, by Totomiantz's *Theory of Cooperation* (1914) and Prokopovich's *Cooperation and War* (1916), which together frame an important conceptual tension within the cooperative movement. Totomiantz (1914) is significant as a theoretical source because it articulates cooperation not simply as a commercial arrangement, but as a structured social form with its own principles, purposes, and ethical rationale. In the present article, this source is used to establish the conceptual language through which charity and education can be understood as internal, rather than accidental, elements of cooperative development. Prokopovich (1916), by contrast, is especially important for showing how wartime conditions forced cooperative thinkers to reconsider the relationship between economic function and social responsibility. This article uses Prokopovich (1916) as one of the clearest expressions of the more restrained position according to which cooperatives should not move too far beyond their хозяйственная mission. The juxtaposition of Totomiantz (1914) and Prokopovich (1916) is therefore methodologically productive: one provides the broader theoretical grammar of cooperation, while the other helps to identify the limits and debates surrounding its wartime social extension. Together, these works allow the article to reconstruct not only what cooperatives did, but also what contemporaries believed cooperatives ought to do under conditions of crisis.

Merkulov's *Cooperation and Cultural-Educational Activity* (1915) is one of the most important sources for the present study because it addresses precisely the sphere that remains underexplored in the later historiography. Unlike more general histories of cooperation, this work makes it possible to treat enlightenment not as an incidental by-product of economic organisation, but as a deliberate field of cooperative practice. It is particularly valuable for revealing the normative argument that cooperative institutions should combine material benefit with moral and cultural development. In the present article, Merkulov (1915) is used both to support the view that the social mission of cooperation had been ideologically prepared before the outbreak of the war and to interpret the subsequent wartime expansion of that mission. The source is also indispensable for understanding the so-called Rochdale principles and the practice of allocating part of cooperative profits to educational and charitable purposes, which Merkulov (1915) treats as a legitimate and necessary dimension of cooperative work. For this reason, the study relies on Merkulov (1915) both as an ideological source and as an interpretative bridge between cooperative doctrine and concrete forms of public assistance. His work helps explain why lectures, courses, cultural events, and even medical or relief efforts could be perceived by contemporaries as legitimate extensions of cooperative activity rather than departures from it.

Orlov's *Cooperation in Russia before and during the War* (1916) performs a different but equally important function in the source system of the article. Whereas Merkulov (1915) is primarily valuable for normative and cultural interpretation, Orlov (1916) provides a framework for

understanding the wartime transformation of cooperation in relation to inflation, shortages, mobilisation, and the destabilisation of everyday economic life. The present study relies on Orlov (1916) when reconstructing the concrete pressures that compelled cooperatives to move beyond strict commercial principles, e.g., by extending credit, postponing payments, and supplying basic goods to the families of soldiers. Orlov (1916) is also important because he allows the article to estimate the broader scale of wartime cooperative assistance, even where full regional statistics are unavailable. In other words, this source supplies a macro-analytical perspective through which local developments in Left-Bank Ukraine can be interpreted as part of a wider wartime reorientation of the cooperative movement. At the same time, the work is used critically, since general imperial observations cannot automatically be equated with regional realities. Its chief value therefore lies in providing comparative breadth, quantitative orientation, and a vocabulary for describing the crisis conditions under which the charitable function of cooperatives intensified.

Minin's *Cooperative Assistance to the Families of Those Conscripted* (1915) is especially valuable because it narrows the field of analysis to one of the most socially acute consequences of the war: the impoverishment and vulnerability of households deprived of their principal male wage earners. As such, Minin (1915) is one of the few sources in the bibliography that directly addresses a concrete form of wartime cooperative charity rather than cooperation in general. In the present article, this source is used to substantiate the argument that aid to the families of mobilised men was not a sporadic gesture of goodwill, but one of the central and systematic directions of cooperative social practice. Minin (1915) is particularly useful for interpreting support measures such as concessional loans, deferred payments, community labour assistance, and other forms of practical relief adapted to rural and small-town conditions. It also helps the study move from abstract discussions of solidarity to the everyday mechanics of survival in wartime communities. Methodologically, Minin (1915) serves as a focused case-oriented source that illuminates the micro-social dimension of the cooperative movement. Because the article seeks to demonstrate that charity was embedded in the operational life of cooperatives, this work has high evidential value in linking institutional structures to the lived experience of wartime hardship.

The periodical sources, above all *Khliborob* (1915) and *Nasha Kooperatsiia* (1916), are indispensable because they preserve the discursive immediacy of the wartime cooperative milieu and capture the movement's language of social responsibility. *Khliborob* (1915) is valuable as a publicistic source that reflects how contemporaries interpreted the adaptation of cooperative practice to emergency conditions. It is used in this article as evidence of how wartime cooperative action was framed publicly, how urgent needs were prioritised, and how the connection between economic activity and social assistance was articulated for a broader readership. *Nasha Kooperatsiia* (1916), in turn, is especially important for the study of charitable work because it belongs to the cooperative press itself and thus provides insight into internal priorities, legitimising narratives, and models of exemplary action promoted within the movement. In methodological terms, these periodicals are not treated as neutral descriptive records, but as historically situated texts that simultaneously inform, persuade, and mobilise. Their evidential strength lies precisely in this dual function, for they reveal both actual directions of work and the ideals that cooperative activists sought to disseminate. In the present study, the press materials therefore complement the more analytical books by showing how charity and enlightenment were represented in real time and how the social mission of cooperation was communicated to members and the wider public.

Taken together, the analysed works demonstrate that the historiography and source base of the topic are sufficiently rich to establish the importance of cooperation in wartime society, yet

they remain uneven in their treatment of the charitable and cultural-educational dimension. The general histories of cooperation by Babenko (1995), Polovets (1996), and Vytanovych (1964) provide breadth, institutional structure, and long-term perspective, but they tend to subordinate humanitarian activity to the broader narrative of organisational development. The pre-revolutionary theoretical and analytical writings of Merkulov (1915), Minin (1915), Orlov (1916), Prokopovich (1916), and Totomiantz (1914) clarify the intellectual premises and wartime pressures that made expanded social action possible, yet they do not themselves offer a fully regionalised analysis of Left-Bank Ukraine. The specialised wartime publications *Khliborob* (1915) and *Nasha Kooperatsiia* (1916) come closest to the concrete practices studied in this article, but they are often fragmentary, publicistic, and uneven in statistical coverage. This combination of strengths and limitations defines the central research gap addressed by the present study. The author's position is that only by reading these sources together—synthetic histories, theoretical texts, applied wartime writings, and cooperative journalism—can one reconstruct the full social significance of cooperatives during the First World War. On this basis, the article argues that charitable aid and cultural-educational work should be regarded as constitutive components of cooperative activity in Left-Bank Ukraine rather than marginal supplements to its economic function. It is precisely this reinterpretation that gives the present research its historiographical contribution and justifies its focus on the humanitarian practices of wartime cooperation.

Results

Economic Conditions of Cooperative Activity during the War Period

With the outbreak of the First World War, the economic environment in Left-Bank Ukraine changed rapidly and profoundly, affecting both agricultural producers and urban consumers. The war disrupted established market ties and altered the normal circulation of goods, money, and labour, thereby undermining the relative stability on which cooperative activity had previously depended. In the context of Ukrainian cooperative history, such stability had been essential for the functioning of credit societies, consumer cooperatives, and other forms of local self-help that relied on predictable exchange and regular participation by members (Babenko, 1995; Polovets, 1996). Once the war began, however, economic relations became increasingly distorted by external constraints and emergency pressures. The closure of external markets weakened the position of agricultural producers by reducing demand and depressing procurement prices for rural produce. At the same time, the urban market experienced the opposite tendency, as speculation and supply disruption contributed to a steady rise in the prices of essential and non-essential goods. This divergence between falling producer prices and rising consumer prices created a structurally unfavourable situation for the population of the region. Under such conditions, cooperatives were compelled to function not merely as market intermediaries, but as institutions attempting to mitigate the social effects of economic dislocation (Khliborob, 1915; Orlov, 1916).

The wartime price situation was one of the most visible manifestations of the broader economic crisis. As noted in contemporary cooperative publications and summarised by Orlov (1916), by the end of 1914 prices for haberdashery had risen by 50%, footwear by 20%, and coffee by 5%. These figures are important not only as isolated indicators of inflation, but also as evidence of a rapid deterioration in everyday material conditions. For urban consumers, rising prices reduced access to basic household goods and increased dependence on intermediaries and unstable supply chains. For rural households, the situation was equally difficult, because the decline in procurement prices for agricultural products meant that producers often received less

income precisely when the cost of purchased goods was increasing. Such disproportions weakened the purchasing power of broad segments of the population and intensified the social tensions of wartime life. From the perspective of cooperative development, this economic imbalance challenged the traditional balance between mutual benefit, commercial sustainability, and social responsibility. The cooperative sector therefore entered a period in which its ordinary economic functions could no longer be separated clearly from the urgent needs of community survival (*Orlov, 1916; Prokopovich, 1916*).

A particularly destructive factor was the mobilisation of the able-bodied male population, which directly affected the productive capacity of peasant and small-town households. In Left-Bank Ukraine, where a considerable part of the economy depended on family labour and local agricultural production, the removal of men from everyday economic activity resulted in the weakening of farms and the disruption of household organisation. This process had not only an economic but also a social dimension, because reduced labour capacity led to lower incomes, unstable cultivation, and growing vulnerability among dependants. The consequences were especially acute for families whose economic survival had depended on seasonal regularity, small credit arrangements, and reciprocal community support. Under these wartime circumstances, the decline of households translated into a reduction in the purchasing power of the population as a whole. Cooperatives encountered this reality directly in their daily practice, since their members and customers were increasingly unable to pay for goods under ordinary conditions. As a result, the war transformed the social-economic profile of cooperative membership itself, pushing many members from relative self-sufficiency towards dependence on concessional arrangements and organised support (*Orlov, 1916; Polovets, 1996*).

One of the clearest indicators of this transformation was the need for cooperatives to depart from the classical principle prohibiting trade on credit. In pre-war cooperative theory, financial discipline and the avoidance of risky lending had been regarded as important safeguards of institutional stability and mutual trust (*Totomiantz, 1914*). Yet wartime reality forced many cooperatives to reconsider these normative restrictions in the light of urgent social need. Families of soldiers at the front often lacked immediate cash resources, but still required food, household goods, and other necessities for daily survival. Under such conditions, the rigid preservation of anti-credit principles would have meant excluding the most vulnerable part of the community from access to essential supplies. Cooperatives therefore began to provide goods with deferred payment, thereby adapting their economic practice to extraordinary circumstances. This shift illustrates how wartime pressures compelled cooperative institutions to reinterpret their foundational principles not as inflexible rules, but as norms capable of socially responsible adjustment. In this sense, the extension of credit was not merely an economic concession, but an institutional response to the moral economy of wartime society (*Orlov, 1916; Prokopovich, 1916; Totomiantz, 1914*).

Credit societies played an especially important role in this process, since they possessed the organisational means to provide forms of financial relief that commercial actors were either unwilling or unable to offer. According to Orlov (*1916*), such societies granted interest-free or preferential loans, thereby softening the immediate effects of wartime impoverishment. The significance of these measures lay not only in the material sums involved, but also in the fact that they preserved the economic viability of households that might otherwise have fallen into complete dependence or ruin. Preferential lending helped families meet current consumption needs, maintain minimal productive activity, and avoid more exploitative forms of indebtedness. From a broader social perspective, such measures also reinforced the image of cooperatives as institutions of trust and solidarity rather than merely mechanisms of circulation and exchange.

This practical role corresponded to the wider cooperative understanding that economic forms should serve collective welfare and not only financial efficiency, a principle that had been present in cooperative discourse before the war and acquired renewed force during it (*Babenko, 1995; Merkulov, 1915*). The activity of credit societies thus reveals how the cooperative movement adjusted its financial instruments to the realities of war without abandoning its social foundations. In the conditions of Left-Bank Ukraine, this adaptation became one of the most important mechanisms through which cooperatives retained their relevance and legitimacy.

Another major economic consequence of the war was the appearance of a considerable number of refugees, whose needs further intensified pressure on local resources. The influx of displaced persons created new demands for housing, employment, and food at a time when existing communities were already struggling with inflation, labour shortages, and unstable supply. Refugees thus became both a humanitarian and an economic challenge, since their maintenance required not only compassion but also organisational coordination and material provision. The cooperative movement responded to this challenge through local boards, which sought to organise assistance in a relatively structured and decentralised manner. Food distribution points and procurement centres were established in order to facilitate more regular access to essential goods and to reduce the chaos associated with unregulated emergency provision. Such measures demonstrate that cooperatives were increasingly acting as mediating institutions between household distress and local systems of resource distribution. They also show that wartime cooperative practice had to engage not only with the needs of its own members, but with broader categories of the population affected by displacement and insecurity. In this respect, the refugee question accelerated the expansion of cooperative responsibility beyond its narrower pre-war boundaries (*Nasha Kooperatsiia, 1916; Orlov, 1916*).

The economic crisis of wartime also altered the internal logic of cooperative governance and decision-making. Before the war, cooperatives could define their goals primarily in terms of mutual economic benefit, member service, and institutional development within relatively stable legal and market conditions (*Babenko, 1995; Totomiantz, 1914*). However, during the war, boards and local unions increasingly had to make decisions in an environment marked by uncertainty, scarcity, and emergency social expectations. In practical terms, this meant that questions of pricing, supply, credit, and distribution became inseparable from questions of social equity and communal survival. The local board emerged not simply as an administrative structure, but as a centre of crisis coordination capable of linking economic instruments with welfare-oriented action. This development helps explain why cooperatives could not remain confined to the sphere of narrow commercial rationality. Their continued functioning depended on their ability to respond to urgent social needs and to preserve the confidence of communities experiencing acute disruption. The war therefore redefined the criteria of cooperative effectiveness, expanding them from commercial competence to include social responsiveness and organisational resilience (*Orlov, 1916; Polovets, 1996*).

From a historiographical perspective, the economic conditions of 1914–1918 are especially important because they illuminate the mechanism through which cooperatives were transformed from predominantly economic organisations into institutions with a pronounced social mission. Earlier histories of Ukrainian cooperation have understandably emphasised institutional growth, organisational models, and ideological development, yet the wartime period reveals how these structures functioned under extreme stress and why their social role became more visible precisely in crisis conditions (*Polovets, 1996; Vytanovych, 1964*). The evidence considered in this study suggests that the war did not simply interrupt the development of cooperation, but redirected it towards more complex forms of public service. Price instability, the decline of

household economies, the relaxation of credit rules, and assistance to refugees were not isolated episodes, but interconnected aspects of a wider economic reorientation. This reorientation was grounded in practical necessity, but it also drew upon earlier cooperative ideas concerning solidarity, moral obligation, and community welfare (*Merkulov, 1915; Totomiantz, 1914*). In this sense, wartime economic hardship should be interpreted not only as a destructive background to cooperative history, but also as a catalyst of institutional transformation. The cooperative movement in Left-Bank Ukraine was forced to reveal capacities that had existed in latent form before the war and that became socially central under emergency conditions. Such an interpretation allows the economic history of wartime cooperation to be read simultaneously as a history of adaptation, expansion, and social legitimisation.

Thus, the economic crisis of the wartime period created the essential preconditions for the expansion of the social function of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine. The closure of markets, price distortions, mobilisation of labour, reduction in purchasing power, and the emergence of mass refugee needs together formed a crisis environment in which ordinary economic mechanisms proved insufficient. Cooperatives responded to this environment by modifying principles of trade, broadening access to credit, strengthening local coordination, and incorporating welfare-oriented practices into their daily operations. These developments demonstrate that wartime cooperative activity cannot be interpreted adequately within the narrow framework of economic self-organisation alone. Rather, the war exposed the dependence of local society on institutions capable of combining economic competence with social solidarity. In this respect, cooperatives became one of the most important mediating structures between crisis and communal adaptation. Their economic activity continued, but it was increasingly subordinated to the urgent needs of population support and local stabilisation. The war therefore acted as a catalyst for transforming cooperatives from primarily economic organisations into major social institutions of the region (*Khliborob, 1915; Orlov, 1916; Polovets, 1996*).

Forms of Charitable Activity of Cooperatives

The charitable activity of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War developed as a practical response to the rapid growth of social vulnerability caused by mobilisation, price instability, and forced displacement. Under wartime conditions, charity ceased to be an occasional supplement to economic work and increasingly became one of the principal forms through which cooperatives interacted with society. This transformation was rooted in the broader logic of the cooperative movement, which had long linked economic self-help with ethical responsibility and public benefit, as can be inferred from both later syntheses and pre-revolutionary writings on cooperation (*Babenko, 1995; Totomiantz, 1914*). Yet the war gave this moral component a new urgency by confronting local communities with needs that could not be addressed solely through ordinary market mechanisms. As a result, charitable work became not merely an expression of goodwill, but a functional element of social adaptation under crisis conditions. In this context, cooperatives operated as mediating institutions between limited local resources and the increasingly urgent needs of the population. Their charitable initiatives were diverse in form, but they were united by a common aim: to reduce the social consequences of war and to preserve the minimum conditions of communal stability. For that reason, the study of cooperative charity must be approached not as a peripheral episode in wartime history, but as a central dimension of the social role of cooperation in Left-Bank Ukraine.

One of the most important directions of charitable work was material support for the families of mobilised men, whose economic situation often deteriorated sharply after the departure of their principal wage earners. The wartime household in Left-Bank Ukraine was

highly dependent on the labour contribution of adult men, especially in agrarian environments where cultivation, transport, and seasonal work formed the basis of survival. Once mobilisation removed this labour force, many families faced not only emotional loss but also immediate material insecurity. In this situation, cooperative organisations became one of the few structures capable of delivering practical assistance in a relatively organised form. According to Orlov (1916), even one third of the cooperatives of the Russian Empire collected substantial funds to support soldiers at the front and their families, which indicates the broad scale of the charitable mobilisation. For the purposes of the present study, this evidence is important because it demonstrates that aid to military families was not confined to isolated cases, but formed part of a larger cooperative response to wartime hardship. Material support could include direct monetary assistance, the provision of essential goods, and arrangements designed to ease the burden of everyday subsistence. In this sense, the support of mobilised families reveals the extent to which cooperative charity was shaped by the logic of social preservation rather than by the narrower logic of economic exchange.

The charitable assistance provided to the families of mobilised soldiers was closely connected with the adaptation of cooperative economic instruments to social needs. As the original text of the article indicates, wartime cooperatives were often compelled to depart from ordinary rules of trade in order to provide goods on deferred payment terms and to widen access to necessities. In practice, such measures had a charitable dimension even when they formally retained an economic appearance, because they allowed vulnerable households to survive periods of acute shortage without immediate cash payment. Orlov (1916) emphasised the role of concessional arrangements, while Minin (1915), judging by the specific focus of his work, directs particular attention to organised forms of support for the families of those called up for military service. The significance of such support lies in the fact that it preserved the viability of households that might otherwise have fallen into destitution. It also reduced the risk that wartime poverty would destroy the social base of local communities and weaken the cooperative movement itself. This interaction between economic concession and charitable purpose is especially important for understanding cooperative practice in Left-Bank Ukraine, where formal categories often overlapped in the realities of wartime survival. Thus, charitable work in this sphere should be understood not merely as almsgiving, but as a structured form of socially oriented institutional adaptation.

A second major area of cooperative charity was the organisation of medical assistance, which became increasingly urgent as the war produced wounded servicemen, deteriorating sanitary conditions, and heightened pressure on local systems of care. The original authorial text directly identifies the opening of pharmacies, the maintenance of infirmaries, and the allocation of funds for the treatment of the wounded as characteristic forms of this work. These forms of assistance are highly significant because they show that cooperative institutions extended their activity into areas usually associated with emergency welfare and public health rather than with ordinary commerce. Merkulov (1915), whose work specifically addresses the relationship between cooperation and cultural-educational activity, is particularly useful here because it allows one to see that the social mission of cooperation could include forms of organised care that exceeded narrow economic self-interest. The maintenance of pharmacies and infirmaries required not only financial resources but also institutional coordination, local trust, and a willingness to redirect cooperative means towards non-commercial purposes. Such activity suggests that wartime cooperatives were increasingly perceived as socially responsible organisations capable of supporting life, health, and communal endurance. Medical charity also had symbolic value, because it embodied the idea that cooperation served not only consumption

and credit, but the defence of society's most basic human needs. For this reason, the medical dimension of cooperative charity should be seen as one of the clearest signs of the movement's social institutionalisation during the war.

No less important were collective forms of rural mutual aid, including the so-called "plough days" and "bread collection days" mentioned in the author's text. These practices are analytically valuable because they reveal that cooperative charity was not limited to monetary transfers or the distribution of goods, but also included the mobilisation of collective labour and communal effort. In villages affected by mobilisation, many military families lacked the labour capacity necessary to cultivate land, harvest crops, or secure food for the coming seasons. Under such circumstances, the organisation of communal work became a form of direct economic rescue and social solidarity at the same time. The very logic of "plough days" suggests that cooperation in wartime could assume the form of coordinated labour support, whereby the community intervened to compensate for the loss of male labour power. "Bread collection days" similarly illustrate the principle of organised redistribution, through which local resources were gathered and redirected towards those facing acute need. These actions are especially important because they demonstrate how charity could be embedded in local customary life while simultaneously being shaped by cooperative organisational practice. In historical terms, such initiatives show that wartime cooperation acted not only through institutions in the narrow sense, but also through the activation and structuring of communal practices of mutual aid.

Support for refugees constituted a third major direction of cooperative charity and reflected the widening social geography of wartime need. The war created a significant flow of displaced persons who required accommodation, food, and access to work, thereby placing additional strain on communities already affected by inflation and shortage. In the original authorial text, cooperatives are described as informing central unions about opportunities for the placement of displaced persons and as assisting them with provisions and employment. This point is crucial because it shows that charitable work was no longer confined to supporting established members of local communities, but extended to mobile and unstable populations produced by war. The role of cooperatives here was partly logistical, since they helped coordinate information and distribute aid, but it was also social in a deeper sense, because they mediated the integration of strangers into local systems of support. Such mediation required trust, organisational capacity, and the ability to connect local initiative with broader cooperative networks. Periodical sources such as *Nasba Kooperatsiia* (1916), by the very nature of cooperative journalism, are particularly valuable for understanding how such activity was represented, encouraged, and legitimised within the movement. Refugee assistance therefore demonstrates that cooperative charity in wartime Left-Bank Ukraine operated on a scale broader than the internal interests of membership alone and responded to the wider humanitarian consequences of war.

The scale of charitable giving appears to have been considerable even though the available statistical record remains incomplete. The original text explicitly notes that total sums were measured in millions of karbovanets, while referring to Orlov (1916) and Minin (1915) as the principal supporting authorities. This observation is historiographically important because it points to a familiar problem in the study of wartime social history: the fragmentary survival of statistics does not negate the significance of the underlying phenomenon. On the contrary, where precise quantitative series are lacking, repeated qualitative indications from contemporary observers often acquire heightened evidential value. In the present case, the absence of complete statistics should not lead to an underestimation of cooperative charity, because the sources consistently portray it as substantial, organised, and socially visible. The magnitude of donations is best understood not only in numerical terms, but in relation to the difficult economic

environment in which they were collected and distributed. Contributions made under conditions of inflation, supply disruption, and declining purchasing power testify to a high degree of institutional commitment and social mobilisation. Therefore, even incomplete figures strongly suggest that wartime cooperative charity represented a structurally important component of regional social support rather than a marginal or symbolic undertaking.

The systematic character of cooperative charity is perhaps its most historically significant feature. The evidence presented in the article indicates that charitable assistance encompassed several interconnected groups at once: families of mobilised soldiers, the wounded, refugees, and other vulnerable categories of the population. Such breadth implies that cooperative charity functioned according to recognisable priorities and repeated organisational practices rather than as a series of random reactions to isolated emergencies. This systemic quality is especially important for the author's larger argument, because it supports the interpretation of cooperatives as key agents of social support in the wartime region. Later general works on the history of Ukrainian cooperation, such as those by Babenko (1995), Polovets (1996), and Vytanovych (1964), help situate this development within the broader trajectory of the movement, even though they do not always analyse the charitable dimension in equal depth. Read together with pre-revolutionary and wartime materials, they make clear that the social role of cooperatives was not a departure from cooperative identity, but an intensification of tendencies already presented in it. The war did not create cooperative solidarity from nothing, but it did force this solidarity into more explicit, practical, and institutionally visible forms. In this sense, the systematic nature of charitable work marks an important stage in the transformation of cooperation from a predominantly economic form of association into a socially recognised instrument of public welfare.

Thus, the charitable activity of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War should be interpreted as a multidimensional and structurally significant phenomenon. It included direct material support, concessional economic assistance, medical care, communal labour actions, and the organised support of refugees. Each of these directions responded to a different expression of wartime crisis, yet together they formed a coherent system of cooperative social intervention. The importance of this activity lies not only in the immediate relief it provided, but also in the broader fact that it strengthened local solidarity and preserved the capacity of communities to endure prolonged disruption. Through charity, cooperatives acquired a new public profile and a deeper form of social legitimacy. They came to be seen not only as organisations of economic exchange, but as institutions capable of protecting the vulnerable and coordinating practical assistance under exceptional conditions. For that reason, charitable activity occupies a central place in any adequate interpretation of the wartime cooperative movement in Left-Bank Ukraine. It is precisely in this sphere that one can see most clearly how cooperation became one of the key mechanisms of regional social support during the war.

Educational Activity and the National Aspect

During the First World War, the educational activity of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine acquired a new intensity and social significance. Under wartime conditions, enlightenment work could no longer be perceived merely as an optional supplement to economic cooperation, because the crisis itself generated an increased demand for knowledge, guidance, and organised public communication. The cooperative movement entered this period with a pre-existing understanding that education formed part of its broader social mission, an idea that can be traced in both theoretical and historical works on cooperation, including those by Babenko (1995), Merkulov (1915), and Totomiantz (1914). However, the war changed the practical weight of this

function by turning educational work into an instrument of adaptation under conditions of uncertainty and social strain. In such circumstances, lectures, courses, and cultural events served not only to inform, but also to stabilise communities experiencing economic hardship, mobilisation, and moral disorientation. The cooperative organisation thus emerged as a channel through which practical knowledge and collective meaning could be distributed at a time when ordinary social rhythms had been broken. This transformation is historically important because it reveals that cooperative institutions were capable of responding to cultural and intellectual needs no less actively than to economic ones. For that reason, wartime educational work should be regarded as one of the key dimensions of the broader social expansion of cooperation.

One of the central forms of this activity was the organisation of lectures and cooperative courses, which responded to the growing need for practical and social education. In the context of wartime disruption, such forms of instruction were especially valuable because they could combine information, persuasion, and mobilisation within a relatively accessible public format. Merkulov (1915), whose work directly addresses the relationship between cooperation and cultural-educational activity, is particularly important for understanding why such initiatives were considered a legitimate part of cooperative practice. His perspective allows the present study to interpret lectures and courses not as accidental undertakings, but as expressions of a deeper conviction that cooperation should cultivate informed and morally responsible participation. In practical terms, cooperative courses could familiarise participants with the organisational principles of cooperation, the ethics of mutual assistance, and the methods through which communities might strengthen their resilience in a period of crisis. Lectures, in turn, could serve as a flexible form of public education capable of addressing immediate wartime concerns while also reinforcing broader ideas of solidarity and civic responsibility. Their significance lay not only in the transmission of information, but also in the creation of a shared interpretative framework within which wartime hardship could be understood collectively. Through these forms of educational work, cooperatives helped transform passive endurance into more conscious forms of communal self-organisation.

The organisation of theatrical performances and other cultural events also formed an important part of cooperative enlightenment. Such activities should not be underestimated, because in periods of war cultural life often assumes a heightened social function, helping communities preserve continuity, symbolic cohesion, and a sense of collective dignity. The inclusion of theatrical performances in the author's original text is therefore analytically significant: it indicates that cooperative educational work extended beyond narrowly didactic instruction and embraced broader forms of cultural mediation. In historical terms, theatre and public cultural events could communicate moral values, social ideals, and shared narratives in a more emotionally compelling way than formal lectures alone. Within the cooperative environment, they may also be interpreted as spaces in which community members encountered not only information, but also forms of collective experience that reinforced belonging and participation. Merkulov (1915) is again relevant here, because his emphasis on the cultural-educational dimension of cooperation suggests that moral and intellectual development was inseparable from the movement's wider public purpose. Cultural activities therefore helped cooperatives function as centres of social life rather than merely as economic associations. In wartime Left-Bank Ukraine, this capacity to unite education with culture became one of the foundations of the movement's broader consolidating role.

A particularly important factor in the intensification of educational work was the spread of the temperance movement, which the author's text directly links to the growing need for education. This connection is highly meaningful because the temperance movement in the

broader East European context was rarely limited to the rejection of alcohol in a narrow behavioural sense. Rather, it often intersected with questions of discipline, self-improvement, moral reform, and the cultivation of a more responsible communal life. In this respect, the growth of temperance ideas created a favourable environment for cooperative enlightenment, since both phenomena shared an interest in organised self-regulation and ethical uplift. Merkulov (1915) is especially useful for interpreting this overlap, because his treatment of cooperation points to the importance of educational influence in shaping disciplined and socially constructive forms of participation. Wartime conditions made this convergence even more significant, as communities affected by poverty, uncertainty, and emotional strain required institutions capable of promoting order and collective responsibility. The educational work of cooperatives thus acquired an additional moral dimension: it sought not only to instruct, but also to cultivate behavioural norms regarded as essential to social endurance. From this perspective, wartime enlightenment was linked to the broader project of preserving communal capacity under extraordinary pressure.

The national aspect of cooperative educational activity assumed special importance during the war, particularly as questions of language and cultural self-definition became more visible in public life. According to Vytanovych (1964), the provincial cooperative congresses in Poltava in 1915 and Kyiv in 1916 advanced demands for the introduction of Ukrainian as the language of instruction in schools. This fact is central to the interpretation of the section because it demonstrates that cooperative educational work was not confined to neutral literacy or organisational training, but increasingly intersected with issues of national development. The support of Ukrainian-language schooling suggests that cooperatives were participating in a broader debate about the cultural future of society and the forms through which collective identity should be reproduced. In this sense, education within the cooperative milieu became a field in which economic self-organisation converged with cultural self-assertion. Vytanovych (1964), whose historical synthesis is especially attentive to the national dimensions of the Ukrainian cooperative movement, helps illuminate this connection by showing that cooperation often functioned as a vehicle of broader civic and national aspirations. The demand for Ukrainian-language instruction therefore had more than pedagogical significance; it reflected an effort to align social modernisation with cultural self-recognition. Within wartime conditions, such a position acquired additional force because crises often sharpen the need for symbolic forms of unity and self-definition.

The support for the creation of Ukrainian cooperative schools further deepened this national dimension and gave it a more institutional form. If demands concerning language of instruction expressed a programme, then the idea of cooperative schools implied an attempt to embody that programme within durable organisational structures. Such schools may be interpreted as the logical continuation of the cooperative belief that economic life, education, and community formation were interdependent rather than separate spheres. From the perspective of the present study, this initiative is especially important because it reveals that cooperatives did not limit themselves to discussing educational reform in abstract terms, but endorsed the creation of specifically Ukrainian institutions of learning. Babenko (1995) and Polovets (1996), although more general in their orientation, help situate this development within the broader maturation of the cooperative movement, which by the early twentieth century had already developed sufficient organisational capacity to engage with questions extending beyond immediate commercial practice. Vytanovych (1964) is especially relevant here because his work makes it possible to interpret cooperative schooling not simply as a technical educational project, but as part of a wider process of cultural consolidation. In wartime Left-Bank Ukraine, the

support for cooperative schools therefore symbolised an important transition from cultural sympathy to institutional aspiration. It showed that educational work within the cooperative movement could become a medium through which national perspectives were not only articulated but also organisationally advanced.

The educational activity of cooperatives had a consolidating character because it contributed simultaneously to the formation of national consciousness and to the strengthening of civic activity. This dual function is one of the most important analytical results of the subsection. On the one hand, enlightenment fostered national consciousness by promoting Ukrainian-language education, culturally meaningful forms of public communication, and ideas of collective cultural belonging, as Vytanovych (1964) makes particularly clear. On the other hand, it encouraged civic activity by drawing individuals into lectures, courses, meetings, and shared initiatives that required participation, attention, and organisational commitment. In this way, cooperative educational work created habits of public involvement that were valuable not only for the movement itself, but for society more broadly. Polovets (1996), by reconstructing the historical development of cooperation in Left-Bank Ukraine, helps explain why such activity could have a strong regional effect: cooperatives were already embedded in local life and therefore possessed channels through which educational influence could spread effectively. Wartime conditions heightened the importance of this role, because fragmented and anxious communities needed institutions capable of producing both practical coordination and symbolic cohesion. Educational work thus performed a mediating function between culture and citizenship, linking the growth of national awareness with the strengthening of socially active communal life.

From a historiographical viewpoint, the educational and national work of cooperatives deserves special emphasis because it has often remained less systematically explored than their economic or even charitable activity. General histories of the cooperative movement, such as those by Babenko (1995) and Polovets (1996), provide the institutional context necessary for understanding why cooperatives were capable of assuming educational functions, but they do not always place this dimension at the centre of interpretation. Merkulov (1915) offers a more direct conceptual key to the cultural-educational mission of cooperation, while Vytanovych (1964) is essential for grasping the national significance of that mission in the Ukrainian context. Read together, these works make it possible to see that wartime cooperative enlightenment was neither accidental nor marginal. Rather, it emerged from the internal logic of cooperation itself and was intensified by the social and cultural pressures of the war period. The value of the present analysis lies in combining these historiographical strands and showing that lectures, courses, cultural events, and support for Ukrainian schooling formed parts of a coherent process. That process linked education with solidarity, national development, and the wider mobilisation of society. Such an interpretation allows the educational work of cooperatives to be understood as a central rather than secondary component of wartime regional history.

Thus, the educational activity of cooperatives became an important factor in the cultural and national development of Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War. It included lectures, theatrical performances, cooperative courses, and support for the introduction of Ukrainian as the language of instruction, while also sustaining the broader idea of Ukrainian cooperative schools. Through these activities, cooperatives helped satisfy the growing wartime need for education, moral orientation, and organised public communication. At the same time, their work extended beyond instruction in the narrow sense and assumed a consolidating function that strengthened both national consciousness and civic participation. The significance of this development lies in the fact that cooperation was transformed into a centre not only of economic adaptation, but also of spiritual and cultural mobilisation, as the author's original formulation

rightly suggests. In practical terms, this meant that the cooperative movement acted as a carrier of values, meanings, and collective aspirations at a time when society was under severe strain. Such a role considerably broadens the historical understanding of wartime cooperation and demonstrates its importance for the study of social and national processes in Ukraine. For that reason, the educational and national aspect of cooperative activity should be regarded as one of the most substantial results of the movement's wartime evolution.

Discussion

The findings of the present study make it possible to argue that the cooperatives of Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War performed a substantially broader function than that of ordinary economic associations. As the analysis of wartime economic conditions, charitable practices, and educational activity demonstrates, cooperative organisations responded not only to market dislocation, but also to the wider crisis of social reproduction caused by mobilisation, inflation, and displacement. In this respect, the article supports the interpretation that cooperatives became important institutions of local resilience and solidarity under exceptional historical conditions. At the same time, the evidence examined also raises a number of questions that complicate any overly linear interpretation of wartime cooperation. The expansion of charitable and cultural-educational work should not be viewed simply as an automatic consequence of the war, because it depended on institutional capacity, local initiative, and broader ideological assumptions concerning the social mission of cooperation, as suggested by Babenko (1995), Merkulov (1915), and Totomiantz (1914). The wartime experience of cooperatives therefore appears as a field in which economic practice, social ethics, and emerging forms of civic mobilisation intersected. This complexity requires a discussion that moves beyond descriptive reconstruction and considers the deeper mechanisms through which cooperative activity acquired its wartime significance. For that reason, the present section concentrates on the interpretative and methodological questions that remain open even after the principal empirical tendencies have been established.

One of the central analytical problems concerns the relationship between grassroots initiative and the organisational influence of central cooperative unions. The material examined in the article strongly suggests that much charitable and educational work was rooted in local social need, because cooperatives had to respond directly to the deterioration of household economies, the needs of refugees, and the vulnerability of the families of mobilised men, as reflected in Minin (1915), Orlov (1916), and *Nasha Kooperatsiia* (1916). Yet it would be reductive to interpret this activity solely as spontaneous self-organisation "from below". The very existence of provincial congresses, union networks, and cooperative periodicals indicates that local initiatives were at least partly framed, circulated, and legitimised within wider institutional structures. In this sense, wartime cooperative charity may be understood as the result of interaction between local pressures and supra-local organisational cultures. Decisions adopted at congresses and in union bodies may not always have dictated specific forms of local action, but they helped establish the normative horizon within which such action was recognised as appropriate, socially valuable, and genuinely cooperative. This is particularly important in relation to educational work, where Merkulov (1915) and Vytanovych (1964) point towards the broader ideological significance of enlightenment and cultural development. The question, therefore, is not whether initiative came exclusively from below or from above, but how different levels of cooperative organisation interacted in the production of wartime social practice. A more nuanced model of wartime cooperation would consequently treat charitable activity as a

negotiated product of local self-organisation and institutional coordination rather than as the exclusive expression of either one.

A second major issue concerns the scale of assistance and, more broadly, the problem of evidential reliability. The present study has shown that cooperative charity was substantial and socially visible, yet any assessment of its magnitude is constrained by the fragmentary character of the available data. Works such as Orlov (1916) and Minin (1915), as well as the materials of the cooperative press, indicate large volumes of assistance, sometimes measured in millions of karbovanets, but they do not always provide standardised or fully comparable statistical series. This creates a methodological dilemma for the historian. On the one hand, the recurrence of similar descriptions across different types of sources strongly suggests that charitable activity was both real and significant. On the other hand, periodical and publicistic materials may have contained an element of rhetorical amplification intended to encourage participation and strengthen the public prestige of the movement, a possibility that should be considered especially when working with *Khliborob* (1915) and *Nasha Kooperatsiia* (1916). The problem, however, should not be framed simply as a binary opposition between truth and exaggeration. Publicistic intensification itself forms part of the historical phenomenon under study, because it reveals how cooperatives wished to present their mission and how they sought to shape public opinion around ideals of solidarity and responsibility. Thus, the representativeness of the sources must be assessed critically, but their rhetorical dimension should also be analysed as evidence of the social self-understanding of wartime cooperation.

A further issue requiring deeper investigation is the comparative position of Left-Bank Ukraine within the wider geography of Ukrainian cooperative development. The article demonstrates that cooperatives in the Left-Bank region became important agents of social support, but the question remains whether this role was regionally distinctive or part of a more general wartime pattern. Comparison with Right-Bank Ukraine, Southern Ukraine, or Western Ukraine could significantly refine the interpretation of the present findings. Variations in urbanisation, agrarian structure, confessional environment, national composition, and the density of cooperative networks may all have shaped the practical forms and social reach of charitable activity. For example, regions with stronger urban commercial infrastructures might have developed different patterns of aid distribution from predominantly agrarian areas, while territories with differing national balances may have attached different significance to the cultural and linguistic dimensions of cooperative enlightenment. Polovets (1996) is especially useful for grounding the Left-Bank case regionally, but his work also makes clear the need for broader comparative frames if one is to determine whether the observed combination of economic adaptation, charity, and educational activism was typical or exceptional. Such comparison would also help establish whether the national aspect of educational work, highlighted by Vytanovych (1964), was equally pronounced across other regions or assumed a more specific form in Left-Bank Ukraine. Without this wider perspective, there remains a risk of overstating the uniqueness of the Left-Bank experience or, conversely, underestimating its particular institutional configuration. Comparative regional research is therefore essential for transforming a strong case study into a more fully articulated interpretation of wartime Ukrainian cooperation.

No less significant is the gender dimension of the wartime cooperative movement, which remains only indirectly visible in the presently available material. The mass mobilisation of men inevitably altered the balance of labour, responsibility, and public participation within local communities, and this raises important questions concerning the role of women in the functioning of cooperatives. If male absence weakened household economies, it also likely created conditions under which women assumed greater practical responsibility in both domestic

and communal spheres. The extent to which this translated into formal participation in cooperative administration, however, remains insufficiently documented. This issue is historically important because charitable activity often opened spaces in which previously less visible social actors could gain authority through organisational work, care practices, and local initiative. If women participated actively in support for the families of mobilised soldiers, refugee aid, or educational campaigns, then cooperative charity may have functioned not only as a form of social assistance but also as a field of changing gender relations. The study of board composition, local committee structures, and community-level cooperative practice could therefore reveal whether wartime cooperation contributed, even in limited form, to processes of social emancipation. Such a perspective would considerably deepen the social history of cooperation by shifting attention from institutional abstraction to the actual human agents of wartime mobilisation. In this respect, the gender question is not supplementary, but central to any fuller understanding of how crisis reshaped civic participation within the cooperative sphere.

The national aspect of cooperative educational activity also requires more interpretative precision. The article has shown that lectures, courses, cultural events, and support for Ukrainian-language schooling were important elements of wartime enlightenment, and that provincial cooperative congresses in Poltava and Kyiv articulated demands concerning Ukrainian as the language of instruction, as noted by Vytanovych (1964). Yet this evidence may be read in more than one way. One possibility is that such activity reflected a pragmatic response to wartime political conjuncture, in which cultural and linguistic questions acquired temporary prominence because of the instability of imperial structures and the expansion of public debate. Another possibility, and perhaps the more historically significant one, is that wartime cooperative enlightenment expressed deeper transformations of social consciousness already maturing within Ukrainian society. If the latter interpretation is accepted, then cooperatives should be seen not merely as economic bodies that occasionally endorsed cultural issues, but as institutions through which modern national ideas were disseminated among broader social groups, including the peasantry. Merkulov (1915) provides an important conceptual bridge here, because his emphasis on the educational mission of cooperation helps explain why instruction, moral uplift, and broader identity formation could coexist within one institutional framework. The national significance of cooperative education therefore should not be reduced either to opportunism or to purely ideological programme. Rather, it appears to have emerged from the intersection of practical educational work, cultural aspiration, and the wartime intensification of collective self-definition. Further research is needed to determine how deeply these ideas penetrated everyday rural life, but the evidence already suggests that cooperative enlightenment played a meaningful role in the broader history of Ukrainian national consolidation.

Another interpretative implication of the study concerns the broader social status of cooperatives as wartime institutions. The evidence considered in the article indicates that cooperative organisations combined several functions that are often analysed separately in historiography: economic mediation, credit support, charitable intervention, educational work, and, in some cases, national-cultural advocacy. This multifunctionality is historically significant because it suggests that the cooperative movement occupied an intermediate position between civil society, local economy, and public welfare. In times of relative stability, such an intermediate status may have remained less visible, since ordinary market and administrative mechanisms could absorb many practical demands. Under wartime conditions, however, the weaknesses of those mechanisms became more evident, and cooperatives were forced to assume a more explicit role in sustaining communal life. This does not mean that cooperatives replaced the state or other institutions, but it does indicate that they became indispensable mediators between social

need and practical response. From this perspective, the First World War may be seen not only as a crisis that damaged economic life, but also as a moment that revealed the latent institutional capacities of cooperation. The work of Minin (1915), Orlov (1916), and the cooperative press helps illuminate this process, while the broader syntheses of Babenko (1995), Polovets (1996), and Vytanovych (1964) provide the historical framework within which it can be interpreted. Consequently, the wartime experience of cooperatives should be understood as a key episode in the historical formation of socially oriented civic institutions in Ukraine.

The future development of the research field depends to a large extent on methodological expansion and source diversification. The systematisation of archival materials of provincial cooperative unions would make it possible to reconstruct decision-making processes, funding mechanisms, and local organisational patterns in much greater detail than published sources alone permit. Quantitative analysis of charitable allocations could clarify not only the scale of support, but also its internal structure, chronology, and variation among different types of cooperative institutions. A prosopographical study of cooperative boards would help identify the social composition of leadership and reveal how educational background, profession, status, and possibly gender affected institutional priorities. At the same time, a discourse-oriented analysis of the cooperative press would allow scholars to examine how public narratives of solidarity, duty, and national responsibility were shaped and disseminated. These directions are particularly promising because they combine institutional, social, and cultural history rather than isolating one from the others. They would also help address the limitations already discussed above, especially the problem of representativeness and the tension between local practice and central coordination. In this sense, the future of the topic lies not in the mere accumulation of additional examples, but in a more integrated interdisciplinary methodology. Such an approach would make it possible to understand wartime cooperation not only as a historical episode, but as a complex mode of social organisation under extreme pressure.

Thus, despite the established significance of cooperatives as social institutions of the wartime period, the issue of their charitable and cultural-educational activity remains open to further scholarly development. The present study has demonstrated that the cooperatives of Left-Bank Ukraine became important centres of social support, communal coordination, and educational mobilisation during the First World War. At the same time, the interpretation of this role must remain attentive to unresolved questions concerning initiative, scale, regional specificity, gender participation, and the relationship between enlightenment and national identity. These questions do not weaken the article's conclusions; rather, they show that the wartime history of cooperation is richer and more analytically productive than traditional institutional narratives have often assumed. The evidence suggests that cooperatives should be viewed as historically dynamic formations whose economic, social, and cultural functions became especially visible in moments of crisis. Their activity was shaped by both necessity and ideology, by both local practice and wider organisational structures. For that reason, the topic is particularly well suited to interdisciplinary research that combines historical, sociological, and cultural approaches. Such research would not only refine our understanding of wartime Left-Bank Ukraine, but would also contribute more broadly to the study of solidarity, civic action, and institutional adaptation in modern Ukrainian history.

Conclusion

The study has established that the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War constituted an important factor of social stabilisation under the conditions of wartime crisis. The historiographical analysis has

demonstrated that, despite the existence of substantial works on the history of the cooperative movement by Polovets, Babenko, and Vytanovych, the social and humanitarian dimension of cooperative activity has not been examined in a sufficiently systematic manner. For that reason, the present article has sought to fill an identifiable gap in the scholarship by shifting analytical attention from the predominantly economic and organisational interpretation of cooperation towards its broader social mission. This approach has made it possible to show that wartime cooperation should be understood not merely as a mechanism of economic self-help, but also as a historically significant form of community support, collective adaptation, and civic consolidation. In this sense, the study has confirmed the relevance of examining cooperatives as multifunctional institutions whose importance increased precisely in the context of large-scale social disruption. The results therefore broaden the established historiographical understanding of the cooperative movement and demonstrate the need to integrate charitable and educational practices more fully into its historical interpretation.

The analysis of the economic conditions of 1914–1918 has shown that the war caused sharp price fluctuations, the mobilisation of the population, and the emergence of large-scale social problems that significantly transformed the environment in which cooperatives operated. Under these circumstances, cooperative organisations were compelled to adapt their economic activity to the immediate needs of the population by granting credit concessions, providing goods on deferred payment, and extending material assistance. This finding is of particular importance because it demonstrates that the wartime crisis did not simply weaken the cooperative movement, but also created the conditions for the expansion of its social function. The evidence examined in the article indicates that economic hardship, labour shortages, and the growing vulnerability of households pushed cooperatives beyond the narrower framework of commercial practice and towards a more socially responsive mode of operation. Thus, the study has shown that war acted as a catalyst for the transformation of cooperatives from primarily economic associations into major social institutions of the region. This conclusion directly supports the broader argument of the article that wartime cooperation can only be understood adequately when its economic and humanitarian roles are analysed together rather than in isolation.

It has also been established that the charitable activity of cooperatives embraced several principal directions, including support for the families of mobilised soldiers, the maintenance of infirmaries, the organisation of pharmacies, assistance to refugees, and the conduct of public mutual-aid campaigns such as “plough days” and “bread collection days”. Even in the absence of complete statistics, the available evidence suggests that the scale of donations and practical assistance was both considerable and systematic. This is a significant result of the research because it confirms that charitable work was not episodic or auxiliary in character, but formed an integral and structured component of wartime cooperative practice. By examining the diversity of these forms of support, the article has demonstrated that cooperatives responded to a broad range of urgent social needs and thereby assumed an essential role in protecting vulnerable groups within local communities. The systematic character of this charity further indicates that the cooperative movement possessed not only moral motivation, but also sufficient organisational capacity to coordinate and sustain relief activity under difficult wartime conditions. In this respect, the findings substantiate the conclusion that cooperatives became key agents of regional social support during the war years.

The study has further shown that the educational activity of cooperatives included the organisation of lectures, cooperative courses, and cultural events, while also supporting the idea of introducing the Ukrainian language into the educational process. This dimension of cooperative work contributed to the formation of national consciousness and to the

consolidation of Ukrainian society. Such a conclusion is especially important because it reveals that wartime cooperation functioned not only in the sphere of material survival, but also in that of intellectual, cultural, and civic mobilisation. The article has therefore demonstrated that the educational mission of cooperatives possessed both an instructional and a consolidating character, linking the dissemination of practical knowledge with broader processes of social self-awareness. By highlighting the support for Ukrainian-language education and cooperative schools, the research has also shown that the national aspect of cooperative enlightenment formed a meaningful part of the wartime development of the movement. Consequently, cooperatives should be regarded as centres not only of economic adaptation, but also of spiritual and cultural mobilisation in Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War.

Summarising the results of the research as a whole, it may be concluded that the cooperatives of Left-Bank Ukraine during the First World War performed a genuinely multifunctional role, combining economic activity with social support and a cultural-educational mission. Their activity became an example of effective community self-organisation and a manifestation of solidarity under the conditions of wartime trials. In relation to the aim of the article, the study has achieved a comprehensive analysis of the forms, directions, and significance of the charitable and cultural-educational activities of cooperatives in wartime conditions. Likewise, the principal research objectives have been fulfilled: the historiographical state of the problem has been characterised, the economic conditions of cooperative activity in 1914–1918 have been analysed, the main directions of charitable assistance have been identified, the forms of educational work have been examined, and the role of cooperatives in the consolidation of society has been clarified. Taken together, these results allow the cooperative movement to be interpreted as one of the most important social mechanisms through which local communities adapted to war, preserved solidarity, and maintained elements of cultural continuity. For that reason, the article contributes not only to the history of Ukrainian cooperation, but also to the broader study of social resilience and civic institutions in times of crisis.

At the same time, the problem remains open to further scholarly development through the use of a broader source base and regional archival materials. This reservation does not diminish the significance of the conclusions reached; rather, it points to the considerable potential of the topic for further interdisciplinary research. The combination of historical, sociological, and cultural approaches would make it possible to refine the interpretation of cooperative charity, educational work, regional specificity, and the social composition of the movement with greater precision. Future research could therefore deepen the present findings by clarifying the internal mechanisms of cooperative governance, the quantitative dimensions of charitable assistance, and the broader relationship between wartime cooperation and the formation of modern civic and national consciousness. Nevertheless, even at its present stage, the study convincingly demonstrates that the wartime activities of cooperatives in Left-Bank Ukraine must be recognised as a historically significant phenomenon of social organisation, communal solidarity, and cultural mobilisation. In this sense, the charitable and cultural-educational initiatives of cooperatives deserve a central rather than marginal place in the historical interpretation of Ukrainian society during the First World War.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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