

## Book review

### **Gabriel POPESCU: *COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE - FROM HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS TO THE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER***

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Editing of this paper only after a year at the launch of the volume "Old problems, new relations in agriculture" can be considered as a part of "the scientific programme" of the author who bringing us original data and information about an area which could revive not only agriculture but also the entire contemporary Romanian rural area offering also for various categories of readers horizons which can give a meaning to their actions.

The basic idea of the volume "Cooperation in agriculture from historical arguments to the transfer of knowledge" was mentioned by its author: "... *to speed-up the development of the cooperative sector in Romania, focusing on rural areas and agriculture, requires a rethinking, in terms innovative, of the entire system, when the central objectives must be agrifood market, doubled by the market knowledge transfer, which in time will be the engine of entire agrifood system development (pg.244)...* "

The paper "Cooperation in agriculture from historical arguments to the transfer of knowledge" is a study targeted at processes and phenomena concerning cooperation and association in agriculture with extension from the Romanian rural area to the whole economy and to international events, which affected our country, during the recent 150-200 years.

In this paper were captured and analyzed specific processes and phenomena regarding agricultural cooperatives in three major historical periods (1903-1950; 1950-1989; 1989 to present). Demonstrating a strong capacity for synthesis Prof.Univ.Ph.D.Gabriel Popescu, selected only those processes and phenomena that have marked profound structural changes in agriculture - from the first land reform as the basis for building a Modern society - until our days, when Romania is EU MS and it entered into the second period of the Community programming (2014-2020).

In this context, the present paper is for researchers, academics and practitioners, as well as for political people, from Romania and abroad, a valuable source of information and inspiration on functional cooperative solutions for Romanian rural areas. Also, the volume is a mirror about the current state of agricultural cooperatives. However, by the book "Cooperation in agriculture from historical arguments to the transfer of knowledge", in fact by the abundance and diversity of issues are clarified and structured most important factors that acted in set-up and functioning of cooperatives from Romanian rural areas and, in particular, from agriculture.

Processes and phenomena analyzed and synthesized in this paper are addressed with the utmost seriousness and responsibility detaching at least three major axes/dimensions, as follows:

- i. The dimension of the association and cooperation treated as crucial institutional structure of theoretical and practical knowledge in the development of agriculture and rural area; the two entities are treated in their historical evolution pursuing the intrinsic link with the market and "land ownership movement" (as the author calls the latter). It should be noted that Prof.Univ.Ph.D.Gabriel Popescu treated the constitution and functioning of specific institutional structures as some real "engines" for an optimal use of resources in agriculture, for justification the results

- and for increase the size and efficiency within of small farms, most often, subsistence ones, and of the family households;
- i. The dimension of association and cooperation within the agrifood market and knowledge market; this dimension is defined axis and situated in the European and national framework;
  - ii. The dimension on how Romanian public authorities managing the association and cooperation issues.

Throughout the volume the author deepens analysis of the functionality of dimensions mentioned above of the association and cooperation process because these axes represent essential components for a better understanding of the historical truth and the current and future processes and phenomena on:

- i. The functionality and influence of land ownership on the dynamics of organizational structures, focusing on association and cooperation structures from agriculture;
- ii. The need to strengthen land tenure and agrifood markets, given the role and importance of stimulating growth processes of association and cooperation in agriculture, but also the need to intensify the transfer of knowledge and to develop its specific markets;
- iii. The need for a realistic support of contemporary peasant economy or of the various forms of co-operatives from a rural area which is in the process of modernization and absorption - in uneven rhythms and in varying degrees of completeness – the European values.

The author doesn't forget him quality and he try, almost every time, to combine the theoretical presentation with its practical forms using a rich informational and statistical material, which ensures to the whole approach genuine continuity and originality.

Analyzing the cooperative phenomenon from our country on shows that, in general, in Romania, (i) it (cooperative phenomenon) requires a process of growth and consolidation, and real absorption of European cooperative values and (ii) governmental actions, from the last 24 years, followed, obstinately, productivity problems, neglecting, however, measures and actions related to the revival and adaptation of institutional structures (cooperative also) to the realities of the countryside, of agriculture, in particular. Also, (iii) the author notes that a "relative inertia" in the initiation and putting in place of specific public policies, especially ones referring to the institution building, and, also, their relative indifference faced to legalize and to harmonize of the co-operatist system with the general socio-economic context (national and European one) were due, at least, to the following causes:

- The absence of an integrating vision about the role, complexity and functionality of institutional structures from the branches of national economy;
- The nature, most often, actions initiated sequentially, which were responding to needs of the moment in the absence of future actions projections;
- The lack of experience of public decision people in the field of institutional building taking into account new requirements;
- The absence at the level of decision-makers - both local, regional and central – of a priorities agenda for the medium and long term development and the weak capacity, for some of them, to achieve continuous intermediate evaluation of the effects of actions initiated in view to adjust (technical and legal) them, etc.;
- Low level of education at the population from rural areas, poverty and them favorite orientation for immediate action and the poor quality of communication and information dissemination were some of the causes that have acted as a brake

to the development of cooperatives, which have been identified by the author of this paper.

In this approach to understand the meaning, place and importance of association in agriculture the author treats in the way, very special, the cooperative - which is assimilated with a "player" within the triangle industrialism - personal property - marketing. Also, the author reveals the necessity to generate new attitudes and phenomena related to "... economic ethics rather than blind fighting for efficiency and profit... (pg.191)". In this issue was included the cooperative entities. This solution is described simple and concise, by the author, who intends to mark this reality in the reader's memory, because it is reflected, also, in specific documents regarding the cooperative structures.

The honesty of author faced to the subject matter, faced to public policy makers called to speed-up their efforts to sustain the real cooperative phenomenon in Romania appears strongly in the last chapter with the title: "Development of the co-operatist system – an issue unsolved yet". In this chapter the author realized a synthesis of some successful international experiences in the field of the association and cooperation in order to transfer to Romania the best international practices.

By the entire approach the author aims to contribute (i) to reconsider, on the one hand, the public attitudes, especially of the peasant farmers, to the cooperatives, to the market and, on the other hand, (ii) on attempts to explain and to put in evidence the deeper causes that generated some of stagnation and failures of current public policies in the field. The author is aware that at this point "... a specialized sociological study would still be required to demonstrate with the power of scientific argument, how much truth or non-truth there in this attitude..."

The paper concludes with a summary of the main principles (20 principles) for future architectures (institutional structure) necessary to establish and to operate in Romanian co-operatist agriculture. These 20 main principles are, in fact, a materialization of the theoretical requirements, and an overview of the author contributions, of international experiences.

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After I closed the book, initially I compared it with a journal where the author refers to a phenomenon using a rich and significant socio-economic literature regarding agricultural cooperatives and its own analysis and opinions on the realities from the Romanian village. In the next moment, I found that the volume "Cooperation in agriculture from historical arguments to the transfer of knowledge" is characterized by focusing of time and events - significant on the subject matter, on the one hand and, on the other hand on can discover the author's own ideas and can understand plurivalent dimensions of this volume, such as: a manual for students, practitioners and policy makers; a cooperative economics treaty; a Journal of the cooperative movement with emphasis on Romanian realities... and on can give it many other destinations – it depending on the interest and training... but not least, I appreciate that this volume could become a challenge to set-up a future Experimental Program for a Training and Research Consortium on the Cooperation for the Faculty of Agrofood and Environmental Economics, within Bucharest University of Economic Studies. This Experimental Program would be developed in partnership with specialized institutes of The Romanian Academy, The Academy of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences and The University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine.