

## THE STAGE OF RESEARCH ON THE AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION IN ROMANIA UNTIL 1989

### STADIUL CERCETĂRILOR PRIVIND COOPERAȚIA AGRICOLĂ DIN ROMÂNIA PÂNĂ ÎN ANUL 1989

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**Abstract.** *Frequently encountered in the specialized literature, the topic of agricultural cooperation in Romania has been the subject of numerous research studies. By the end of the World War II, the issues addressed were: benefits, necessity and limitations of the agricultural cooperation; types of agricultural cooperatives in Europe; State support and agricultural credit etc. Later, during the period of socialist agriculture, the researchers focused on other directions, such as: collectivization and its consequences, optimization of production processes and management of cooperative agricultural units etc.*

**Key words:** cooperation, agriculture, Romania, research studies.

**Rezumat.** *Frecvent întâlnită în literatura de specialitate, tema cooperăției agricole din România a făcut obiectul a numeroase cercetări. Până la finele celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial, aspectele abordate se refereau la: beneficiile, necesitatea și limitările cooperăției agricole; tipurile de cooperative agricole din Europa; sprijinul statului și creditul agricol cooperatist etc. Ulterior, în perioada agriculturii socialiste, cercetătorii s-au concentrat pe alte direcții, cum ar fi: colectivizarea și consecințele acesteia, optimizarea proceselor de producție și conducerea unităților agricole cooperatiste etc.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** cooperăție, agricultură, România, cercetări

## INTRODUCTION

The cooperative ideology appeared in Romania during the XIX-th century through the activity of some prestigious personalities of the Romanian culture and policy in that time (Teodor Diamant, Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Nicolae Rusu Locusteanu, Ion Ghica, Nicolae Bălcescu, Ion Ionescu de la Brad, P.S.Aurelian, Spiru Haret etc.), whose ideas have been materialised into original papers and even practical attempts to foster the cooperation in agriculture (for example: “The Phalanstère” from Scăieni). This stage, initiated through the tireless activity of hundreds of teachers from villages who – being urged by Spiru Haret, minister of Education in that time – had carried out an “enlightenment” - work of the peasantry aiming the association in communal ownerships [obști sătești], has been characterised as being *the heroic stage* of the Romanian cooperation (Jinga, 1941).

Starting with the first decades of the XX-th century we can speak about *the modern stage of the cooperation* in Romania, when a range of eminent

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agronomists, sociologists, economists arose, whose practical and public activity included also the agricultural cooperation. It could be said that it is “*the golden period*” of cooperation, when the theoretical bases of cooperation are being laid. The image of the importance and stage of cooperation in the period prior to the year 1945 appeared in numerous papers of the above-mentioned authors, but also in a large number of studies subsequently published, either in the historical context of the Romanian cooperation and of evoking the great personalities of the time (Fruja, 1994), or in the idea of supporting and fostering the cooperation under the current conditions (Vasilescu and Magazin, 1959; Vasilescu, 2003).

In the late XIX century occurred several agrarian reforms in the Western European countries. Prior to the First World War and following the its end, all countries in Central and Eastern Europe accomplished agrarian reforms, inclusively Romania, country with a distinctly agricultural character. The agrarian reform in 1921, although it provided a natural and rational allocation of the agricultural properties, created, instead, an impressive number of precarious economic entities, determining the occurrence of the phenomenon of land fragmentation through the existence of an extremely large number of plots. It was obvious that these fragmented properties not only did not have the possibility to produce surpluses to be traded on the market, but they could not support from their land the owner and his family. Under these conditions, the researchers recommended different solutions, which, the majority of them, concerned *the association and the cooperation* in agriculture. This is how, during the inter-war period, influenced by the models of the European cooperation, the Classics of the Romanian cooperation will contribute, through their activity and works, to the setting up also in Romania of a real doctrine of the agricultural cooperation (Mladenatz, 1938).

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

In order to elaborate the present paper, the topic of agricultural cooperation in Romania was studied by reviewing and analyzing the specialized literature. Based entirely on the research works of the indigenous specialists, the paper aimed to identify the main issues addressed by them with reference to the cooperative phenomenon in the national agriculture during the period prior to the transition to the market economy. The full use of information involved mainly indirect methods (related to the documentation process), specific to the social and human sciences, which consisted in consulting a large number of different bibliographic sources: books, articles published in Romanian journals, theses, scientific papers and large or small-scale research studies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Aware of the negative effects derived from the agrarian reform in 1921 through “the atomising” of the large agricultural surfaces in thousands of very small plots, the researchers concerned with the fate of Romanian agriculture highlighted **the essential role of the agricultural cooperative** in solving this problem, this fact being “determinative for the material and moral development of

the villages” (Cardaș, 1942; Cornățeanu, 1943; Frunzănescu, 1939; Georgescu, 1944; Pienescu, 1944), through its economic, cultural and social advantages: “The agricultural cooperation is meant to eliminate from our national economy, the inconveniences brought by the agrarian reform and to become the determinative factor of progress in the agriculture development and improvement” (Ionescu-Sisești, 1920). It is reiterated the belief that “only the cooperation could intensify the agriculture, it could make possible to get closer to the advantages from the large plant culture and it could guarantee the paying-up of annuities” (Ionescu-Sisești, 1924).

According to the vision of the theoreticians of the Romanian cooperation, **the cooperative enterprise provides in economy the same advantages as the large capitalist enterprise** in comparison with the small artisanal and personal enterprise (Chirițescu-Arva, 1935; Mladenatz, 1938). The agricultural cooperative does not only *maintain the individual property upon land* with all its economic, cultural and social advantages resulting from here, but, in the same time, it offers to the small agricultural producer *the advantages of the large holding* (Mladenatz, 1938; Moldoveanu, 1937; Pienescu, 1944). Both the economic advantages of cooperation, as well as the instructive, educational ones have been emphasized, the cooperative being seen as an instrument to train the small agricultural producers in the professional field, guiding them and making them familiar with the best cultivation methods. The conclusion is: “the cooperative represents, therefore, the optimal form of the agricultural economy” (Madgearu, 1936; Madgearu and Mladenatz, 1995).

Despite the apology of cooperation, the limits of such cooperative societies should not be disregarded, namely **the inhibition of the progress of those associations and of the private initiative** – shortcomings that, according to the opinion of some specialists, could not be replaced than through a special cooperative-related training, being mostly “a problem of moral education and of solidarity-related education” (Mladenatz, 1938). Some authors considered that on the path towards cooperation can be solved all the economic and social problems and can be established a full harmony among the different interests of peoples (Madgearu, 1936; Madgearu and Mladenatz, 1995; Mladenatz, 1938), position that was not only once criticised (Cardaș, 1942; Jinga, 1941).

Taking into account these premises, the researchers’ attention focused mainly on proving **the necessity of the agricultural cooperation for helping the small land-owners** who, alone, were not able to face the major problems challenging the small peasant household: the lack of financial resources to develop and purchase the means of production needed for this purpose (Cardaș, 1942; Galan, 1937; Mihalache *et al.*, 1940) As a result, it is considered to be necessary the setting up of an incentive in order to create “associations for the joint work of peasant land”, meaning communal ownerships, arguing that “through the association of plant cultures could be facilitated the more rapid improvement of technique, and therefore of the agricultural production, through a direct action that the specialist managing these communal ownerships could exercise in order to

develop the agricultural culture among peasants” (Filipescu, 1942; Șandru, 1989). This is how, after the folk / people’s banks, **the lease communal ownerships** [*obștile sătești*] were those cooperatives which, due to the economic circumstances, recorded a larger development before the First World War.

**The form of the agricultural cooperatives** got, also, the specialists’ attention. It is obvious that, already since this period, two different points of view have been shaped concerning the forms of agricultural cooperatives, that persists also today in the specialized literature. Thus, by one hand, it was considered that the only *viable forms of agricultural cooperatives* were those dealing with the *marketing of agricultural products, the processing of those products and the mechanisation of agricultural works* (Chirișescu-Arva, 1930; Galan, 1937; Galan, 1995). In order to make possible for the small agricultural holding to get closer to the advantages of the technical progress and of the market power, it was foreseen the association of agricultural producers *in trading cooperatives and in peratives for processing of agricultural products*, this being perceived as “a life-saving solution” for the small agricultural producers, who were short in operational capital (Madgearu, 1936). Afterwards, by estimating that, under the economic conditions of the inter-war period, the agricultural holding could not be maintained in the world competition without *a grouping of forces through cooperation*, it has been proposed to constitute **specialised cooperatives**, meant to replace **those with multiple functions**, without overlooking the fact that “in the countryside, the existence of the cooperatives with multiple functions is possible and in many cases natural...” (Mladenatz, 1935). In this opinion, **from the very beginning is precluded the possibility of setting up agricultural cooperatives of production**, arguing that the agricultural production is entirely a problem of holding, while the cooperation can create favourable premises to modernize the work process in the peasant agriculture through cheap loans given by the credit unions / cooperatives (Galan, 1937). Other authors considered that **the first link of agricultural cooperation should be constituted by the cooperative of production**, this being designed as an association of the small agricultural producers in order to jointly conduct the land works (Bergheanu, 1933; Ionescu-Sișești, 1920). The premises for the organization of the cooperatives of production were the merger of the peasants’ subplots and the dismantling of ditches and roads that bordered the properties, therefore the agricultural land organization into plots of large sizes, making possible the large scale mechanization of the agricultural works. The merging of small plots into large blocks had the purpose to ensure the crop rotation [asolamentul], mechanization and the application of scientific methods, *the property right remaining untouched and the land being possible to be bought, to be sold or to be inherited*.

Like during the last two decades, also in the inter-war period the Romanian specialists oriented themselves towards **the European models**, whose careful analyse allowed them to conclude that “the family agricultural holding is an increasing stronger reality in the contemporary world, like the industrial

enterprise”, at the global level being noticed *a tendency of the agricultural development towards the family holding* (Jinga, 1941; Madgearu, 1931), fact confirmed, at least for Europe, nowadays too. The cause of such situation consists in – according to the researchers’ opinion – two of the fundamental, social-economic features of the peasant household: the first is *the private property*, “that results from the type of a certain economy”, and the second one is represented by the fact that “the production is organised without using the by-salary-paid work, by the family” (Madgearu, 1936). Expressing their conviction regarding *the economic and social superiority of the peasant family household*, based on several economic, social and pshihological arguments, some specialists considered that *there is no superiority of the large holding, and, if it it would be as such, this could be substituted by “cooperation”*. In the same time it was foreseen also *the social and progress-determining and market-related character of the “small” agriculture*, having in view the fact that an agrarian regime based on small peasant households, but supporting a numerous population, will intensify the agricultural production and will constitute for the industrial market, a domestic / internal market, able to consume large stocks of goods (Cornățeanu, 1943; Corteanu, 1943; Madgearu, 1936). By the other hand, it was launched the idea that, from the economic point of view, the agricultural progress can not result only from the development of production, as *the tradition, the peasant’s education and the technique* are also important factors. In the same time it has been acnnowledged the fact that to the tehcnical culture and to the agricultural civilisation of the Western countries had contributed various factors, including as the most important one, the agricultural cooperation (Galan, 1937; Jinga, 1941).

We can establish, therefore, that two different opinions are drawn up also regarding the importance of cooperation. Some authors points out to an attached to it ideal value, by perceiving this as an “universal cure-all“ for solving all problems of the Romanian society, speaking even about an alternative to the capitalist economy with its harsh laws of competition, alternative named “*cooperative social economy*” (Mladenatz, 1935). In return, other researchers appreciated that the cooperative system is “only a fragment from the activity of modern agriculture” (Jinga, 1941). But, regardless of the larger or smaller significance attached to cooperation, none of the researchers could deny its role or find an alternative – we can not say a viable, but at least an utopian one. As far as the alternative offered by the communist ideology is concerned, this has fully proven its failure.

The specialists paid attention, also, to **the role of State in ensuring the development of agriculture**, this having to contribute to the material support of the technical progress through discounts at agricultural tools and machines purchasing, through organizing of machinery teams around farms, through partially covering the costs for the heavy machines belonging to the cooperative and through the relief of customs duties and the application of reduced railway charges for the agricultural machines (Argetoianu, 1931; Chirițescu-Arva, 1930). The majority of specialists

insisted on the fact that *the State should involve itself more into the cooperation-related problems*. There were also voices according to which the interference of State into the cooperative movement came from a wrong and confuse concept upon cooperation, considering that the role of State in the cooperative movement was detrimental, by bringing into cooperation a hostile atmosphere, work rhythm, technique and system with regard to the cooperative spirit (Jinga, 1941).

Beyond the theoretical aspects of cooperation, it had been also drawn up **practical ideas and solutions to solve the agricultural problems**. Even close to the enforcement of the agrarian reform in the year 1921, in order to avoid the atomization of the peasant property and the overindebtedness of small agricultural producers (Bulgaru, 2003), it has been advanced a solution that foresees *the transformation of the land communal ownership [obștilor de împrăștiare] and of those of agricultural land leasing and purchasing into agricultural cooperatives*] (Ionescu-Sisești, 1920; Ionescu-Sisești, 2002). But these proposals were not taken into consideration, determining the transformation of the large land property, with its economic advantages, into the small peasant household, with precarious inventory and low efficiency (Asandului, 2005; Axenciuc, 1996).

By searching practical solutions to solve the problems of the Romanian economy, especially of the agricultural ones, it has been proposed *a program of agrarian policy*. This program foresaw, beyond a series of „technical” requirements (as such: adjustment of production to the market demands, diminishing of the surface cultivated with cereals and increase of the surface cultivated with technical and fodder plants, full mechanisation of medium and large holdings, technical endowment of the small farmers etc.) also *the setting up of agricultural stations of machinery of cooperative type, as well as the organisation of marketing/trading cooperatives of agricultural production*, in order to supply, through the superior bodies - namely regional federations and national units – the capacity for the peasants to exercise a direct influence upon the export and upon the valorification of their products (Madgearu, 1931).

We have to underline that, in the opinion of the most specialists, the organisation of those cooperatives did not mean *to give up the private property upon land*, but, by contrary, this represented “the most effective tool for initiative and progress” (Bergheanu, 1933; Cardaș, 1942; Ionescu-Sisești, 1920; Jinga, 1941). We point out hereby that, in the same period of time, it has been elaborated one of the most complex argumentation supporting the agricultural cooperation, that, in certain extent, confused the process of collectivisation from USSR with the cooperative movement (Chirițescu-Arva, 1935; Pekar *et. al.*, 1995). Even after the period of crisis 1929-1933, when the relaunch of agriculture was very cumbersome, the economists and the political people continued to advertise the land exploitation by cooperation. The issue of the agriculture organisation continues to be debated, being presented different ways to set up cooperative structures. The ideas influenced mostly by the transformations incurred in that period by the small agricultural production in the Soviet Union, gave occasion to

numerous contradictory comments. Some researchers forgot the principles of cooperation, proposing another type of cooperative (Bergheanu, 1933; Filipescu, 1942), where *the land has to be expropriated and to become the property of commune*, in order to be allocated to the inhabitants by plots, with the work to be accomplished according to a plan established by specialists, the tithe [dijma] and the lease [arenda] being forbidden.

There were also concerns for the issue of **the cooperative agricultural loan**, necessary in order to purchase agricultural machines, that should be “cheap, sufficient and reasonably used” (Mladenatz and Constantinescu, 1936), as well as for **the cooperation-related legislation** (Mladenatz and Oliva, 1935), that should be completed and improved. In the year 1938 occurred a reform of cooperative legislation, introduced by *the Law for the organisation and fostering of agriculture*. The law stipulated the possibility had by those farmers interested in merging to organize themselves into *an communal ownership of agricultural merging and guiding* [obște de comasare și îndrumare agricolă] in order to obtain agricultural surfaces large enough to be mechanically worked.

In this period was not lacking **the criticism on the grounds of cooperation**, expressed in studies analyzing the cooperative movement status and evolution in Romania (Gornescu *et al.*, 1940; Jinga, 1941), where the determinative factors for its failure included: a) the excessive interference of the State by law enforcement, financing and establishing of administrative institutions; b) implication of the political parties, from more or less economical reasons; c) lack of culture, cooperative education and general education with reference to the rural population; d) a literature with excessive theory on cooperation, recalling too often the historical evolution of cooperatives, without setting up a practical note for guidance.

After the enforcement of the proletarian dictatorship (1947) followed the period of agriculture collectivisation, period when there was an unique concept for cooperation that fully misinterpreted the meaning of this term (Cătănuș and Roske, 2000; Tănăsescu, 1992). Also during the period of the socialist agriculture, the specialized literature reflects the scientists' concern for this important problem. It is obvious that it could not be possible to speak about *the essence and principles of the true cooperation*, the attention of specialists being focused towards other directions. Thus, there were concerns regarding the organization, planning and management of the cooperative agricultural enterprises (Vasilescu *et al.*, 1982), it has been intensively debated the issue of the optimal size for the agricultural cooperatives of production (Vasilescu *et al.*, 1968), the sociology of the agricultural cooperative of production (Cernea, 1974), it was presented, of course, adjusted, the way in which the agricultural cooperation occurred in different regions of the country (Vasilescu and Magazin, 1959), it has been tackled problems related to economy, agrarian legislation and work protection (Magazin *et al.*, 1979), economy and organization of animal and plant production (Magazin *et al.*, 1983), different studies on the possibilities of economic development of the agricultural cooperatives of production in hills and foothill areas (Costin, 1977) or referring to

the relation between the agricultural cooperation and the development strategy (Levente, 1978) etc.

Also the beginning period of cooperation came into the specialists' attention during the period of the socialist agriculture, in order to make it known, as much as possible, even in an indirect form, the true face of cooperation: the papers about *the lease communal ownerships from Romania* (Șandru, 1989). There are also presented aspects regarding *the existing situation in the world agriculture in generally, the trends in the evolution of the capitalist cooperation* (Fețeanu, 1975), *the agrarian policies in the world* (Parpală, 1982; Parpală, 1999), who brings us up to date also with the cooperative phenomenon in the capitalist countries, studies aiming to inform the Romanians about the situation in the cooperation field from abroad. The agrarian reform in 1945 and its consequences have been also studied, but the solution provided by the political regime of that time proved to be very detrimental (Dumitru *et al.*, 1977; Giosan *et al.*, 1983; Murgescu, 1956; Murgescu, 1990; Parpală, 1980; Șandru, 1991; Șandru, 2000; IEA, 1980).

In the same time, the researchers succeeded to transmit, even in a more or less disguised form, their opinion regarding the discussed phenomena. Concerning the importance of the agricultural cooperation at global level, we have to quote the affirmation: "...the problem of cooperation among the agricultural producers from various fields of activity (marketing, supply, lease, production) is the problem number one for the modernization of the social structure of the world agriculture both for the developed countries, and especially for the countries under development..." (Giosan *et al.*, 1983), which demonstrates that the specialists from the "communist" period were fully aware of the role of genuine cooperation on the development of agriculture. Unfortunately, this entire huge intellectual effort undertaken by numerous scientists, teaching staff from the higher agricultural education, specialists from the research stations and institutes – the most of them well intended people – has been, many times, useless, by facing the ignorance of some of those who managed the agricultural sector, their incompetence and arrogance, but also the limits imposed to them by the socialist system itself.

## CONCLUSIONS

Until the forced collectivization process, the researchers' concerns included aspects aiming to foster the Western ideas of association and cooperation in the rural areas: the importance of agricultural cooperation; the role and benefits of the agricultural cooperative; types of agricultural cooperatives and the European models of agricultural cooperation; cooperative legislation and the State support; practical solutions to solve the difficulties in agriculture through association; the problem of cooperative agricultural credit; evolution and characteristics of the cooperative movement in the Western countries etc. Subsequently, the agricultural cooperation in Romania was strongly marked by the historical, economic, social and political conditions in which this developed. The forced collectivization process was an important obstacle to the enforcement of the true



forms of cooperation capable of solving the problems of the rural areas. As a consequence, the researchers' concerns avoided the aspects of true cooperation, being oriented towards “the new concept” of cooperation in agriculture: forced collectivization and its consequences; the management and sociology of the socialist cooperative units; optimization of dimensions of the agricultural production cooperatives; organization of the economic activity and the development possibilities for the agricultural production cooperatives etc.

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