

## SUMMARY

of the doctoral thesis entitled:

### **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FORMS OF ASSOCIATION AND COOPERATION IN AGRICULTURE UNDER LEGAL, MANAGERIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECT AND THEIR IMPACT ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT. CASE STUDY**

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At the international level, there is a campaign to support and promote the sustainable development of the rural area, through cooperation and association, through the elaboration and application of concentration and development strategies regarding how farmers should act to organize and manage viable agricultural farms, profitable, with sell markets and the possibility of accessing European funds.

In this sense, cooperation and association, through their already established forms, respectively: agricultural cooperatives, group of producers and professional associations, can be considered fundamental directions for rural integration in the European area, through the services provided to the members of the rural community in a sustainable way. The main purpose of the doctoral thesis is the analysis of the conditions and methods of cooperation and association of farmers in South Muntenia Region, with special reference to Călărași county, of the legal, managerial and economic aspects specific to the associative structures in Călărași county and of the impact on the development of the rural area, which will lead to the detection of some development directions for the agricultural associative area in Romania, starting from the situation identified through processed and analyzed statistical data, but also through the application of survey, through questionnaires and interviews, among cooperating and associated members.

As presented in Chapter II. The purpose, objectives, indicators and research methods, for the thesis entitled "Comparative analysis of the forms of association and cooperation in agriculture under legal, managerial and economic aspects and their impact on rural development" methods and indicators were used, such as: documentation and analysis, the comparison, the graphic method, the interview and the questionnaire, in which descriptive statistical indicators were analyzed such as: Chi-square, coefficient of variation, standard deviation, growth rate.

In order to analyze the evolution of agricultural cooperatives and groups of producers in Romania, we extracted from the ONRC database all registrations of agricultural cooperatives both at the national level and in the counties of South Muntenia Region, for the analyzed period and for groups of producers, the website of the Ministry of Agriculture; for the evolution and structure of the associations, we accessed the national and county website with their list for the year 2022, we consulted the website of the Ministry of Public Finance to identify the agricultural cooperatives and groups of producers in each county, we centralized and processed the data at the level national, regional and county; we completed the information with the support of Călărași Agricultural Directorate and through the information obtained directly from cooperatives, groups of producers and associations, based on questionnaires and interviews.

As part of the thesis, the questionnaire was completed by 119 people, for the analysis of the legal, managerial and economic aspects of agricultural cooperatives and groups of producers, and by 95 persons from the agricultural associations of Călărași county. The comparison method was used in the analysis of the data

series that included time periods between the years 2000 and 2009 and 2010 and 2020, or 2021 depending on the available data. For each period, the indicators were calculated: the average, the standard deviation, the coefficient of variation and the annual growth rate. The data obtained for the two periods were compared through the differences between the averages and growth rates of the analyzed technical-economic phenomena and the statistical evaluation of these differences for probabilities of 95%, 99% and 99.9%.

Chapter III. The analysis of the conditions and methods of cooperation and association of farmers from South Muntenia Region, with special reference to Călărași County, approaches the presentation of the natural, economic and social conditions of South Muntenia Development Region with special reference to Călărași county and makes an x-ray of the associative structures constituted in the region, comparatively, by county and with the existing situation at the national level.

In South Muntenia Region, in addition to the favorable natural conditions, there is a great potential for the development of agriculture, the economic efficiency of agricultural activity being determined by the interdependent links that are established between land-property-exploitation.

In 2021, the share of the agricultural area, compared to the total area, was 63%, higher than the share at the country level, which was 61%. The arable area in the region represented 57.15% of the total area, compared to 39.2% at the country level. The share of pastures in agriculture was 8.31% (compared to 13.7% for the country); the same reduced level was also achieved in hay of 3.16% (compared to 6.5% at the country level)

In Călărași County, 84% of the county surface is owned by agricultural lands, their growing being oriented in particular towards the growing of grains, oilseeds and fodder plants. From the perspective of the comparison between the counties of the region, Călărași county (20.84%) occupies the second place with the most extensive arable surface, after Teleorman (23.10%). The number of active agricultural enterprises in the period 2016-2021 shows an increase of 7.4%, from 557 in 2016 to 598 in 2021, with an annual growth rate of 1.69%.

The population of Călărași county decreased from 343 thousand inhabitants in 1992 to 299.6 thousand inhabitants in 2022, a decrease of 5.4 thousand inhabitants, which is considered very significantly negative. At the level of Călărași county, of the total population in 2022, 119.4 thousand inhabitants live in the urban environment (39.86%) and 180.1 thousand inhabitants live in the rural environment (60.14%).

Analyzing the evolution of the number of cooperatives in Romania, it is found that the trend is an increasing one, from 321 existing cooperatives in 2012, reaching 2273 agricultural cooperatives in 2022, respectively, a percentage increase of 708%, the largest increases being recorded after 2016. The largest number of cooperatives was established in 2022, respectively, 752 cooperatives, followed by 2018, with a number of 280 established cooperatives. Depending on the functionality, at the level of 2022, of the 2273 existing cooperatives, 264 have suspended or interrupted their activity, respectively, 12%.

At the level of the analyzed region, in 2022 there were 359 cooperatives, respectively, 15.8% of the total of cooperatives established in Romania. By county, Teleorman county holds the share, with 28.9% of the number of established cooperatives, followed by Dâmbovița with 16.4% and Călărași with 15.8%. In last place is Prahova county, with a percentage of 5.3% in the total number of cooperatives established in the region.

Regarding the structure, among the 359 cooperatives, 52.9% are the first degree, compared to 35% at national level and 47.1% are the second degree, respectively 169 cooperatives.

In 2022, 362 groups of producers were established at the national level, the most being in Bihor county, with a number of 37 groups of producers and in Suceava and Călărași counties, with a number of 21 groups. At the level of the same year, a number of 233 groups were active, respectively, a percentage of 64%, while 129 groups had suspended activity or a decision to withdraw from activity.

In South Muntenia Region, in 2022 there were 69 groups of producers, a percentage of 19.1% of the total groups organized nationally.

The largest number of producer groups can be found in Călărași county, respectively, 21 organizations, a percentage of 30.4% of the total of South Muntenia Region, and of these, 13 groups are active in the field of cereals and oilseeds.

Of these, in South Muntenia Region, a number of 45 groups were active at the level of the same year, respectively, a percentage of 65%, while 24 groups had suspended activity or a decision to withdraw from activity.

Regarding the associations, out of the total number of 110524 associations established at the national level, only 5240, respectively, 4.74% are established to promote the interests of farmers.

At the level of the analyzed region, in 2022, 10,079 associations were established, respectively, a percentage of 9.12% of the total of these organizations established at the national level. Of these, 6.77% were established in the agricultural field.

Among the counties of South Muntenia Region, Prahova county holds the majority, with 33.02% of the number of NGOs established in the Region, followed by Argeş county with 23.92% of the number of these associative structures. The two counties also hold the weight in the category of associations with an agricultural profile, with percentages of 18.89% and 16.84%, respectively.

It is noted that, in the period 2018-2022, the total number of NGO-type associations, in Călăraşi County, increased significantly, from 324 organizations in 2018, to 618 in 2022, a percentage increase of 190.7%. Regarding the associations with an agricultural profile, the increase is much more pronounced, respectively, from 32 organizations in 2018 to 94 in 2022, a percentage increase of 293.8%, the highest increase being registered in the years 2021 and 2022.

Chapter IV. Evaluation of associative structures in Călăraşi county, based on questionnaire and interview. In order to substantiate the pragmatic objectives of the paper, we selected 73 associative structures from Călăraşi county, which had a balance sheet in 2021, for which we used a mix of quantitative and qualitative tools and techniques, which combine the review of specialized literature, the analysis of statistical data and registers regarding the patrimonial situation, we carried out a survey based on a questionnaire and applied interviews to test the hypotheses and gather additional information.

In the identification of the study sample, the condition was imposed that the associative structure should be active, an aspect verified by submitting the balance sheet for the year 2021 and later confirmed by phone by the representatives of these structures, when establishing a meeting to apply the questionnaire, respectively the interview.

At the level of 2021, 39 cooperatives out of the 50 existing functional ones in Călăraşi county, respected the criterion of submitting the balance sheet, and 6 cooperatives were established in 2021, according to the Register of Cooperatives on the MADR website. Among the 20 first degree agricultural cooperatives, existing in Călăraşi county in 2022, we selected for the study 12, which submitted balance sheets in 2021, and among the 37 second degree, we included in the sample 25, which also have complied with the criterion of submitting the balance sheet in 2021.

In the case of groups of agricultural producers and agricultural associations, their representatives were contacted by telephone following the consultation of the public lists on the MADR website, the information received from Călăraşi Agricultural Directorate and Călăraşi County Council. 21 agricultural associations were included in the study, one of which also obtained approval for recognition of the producer group quality.

Also, 15 groups of producers were included among the 21 existing in Călăraşi county, of which 13 received approval for recognition in the Cereals, oleaginous plants, fodder plants sector and 2 are with mixed recognition, respectively, cereals, oleaginous plants, vegetables, meat, dairy, etc.

All 73 associative structures are active and functioning in Călăraşi county, conditions established as selection criteria. In order to carry out an evaluation of the associative forms in Călăraşi County, regarding the results and the activities carried out, we proceeded to develop a questionnaire and an interview guide for the survey of representatives of agricultural cooperatives and groups of producers, applied to a sample of 119 respondents, respectively, applying a questionnaire to representatives of agricultural companies, on a sample of 95 respondents.

Most of the respondents answered that the associative structure developed the vision and strategy in written format, known by the members of the associative structure, the daily activity is carried out without

major problems, fluid, in the sense that the legal development procedures do not encounter difficulties, the quality standards are defined and respected, communication and conflict management are functional and the group is cohesive.

Chapter V. The impact of associative forms on rural development analyzes the perception of the representatives of the associative structures included in the research sample regarding the impact of these structures on the development of rural communities.

Both the representatives of agricultural cooperatives and producer groups, as well as those of the associations subject to the study, were asked to evaluate the statement "Association and cooperation have an impact on the development of the rural area" using the scale of values 'disagree', 'partially agree' and 'agree total'.

From the information collected and analyzed, it results that the majority of respondents, in a cumulative percentage of over 93%, appreciate with partial or total agreement that association and cooperation have an impact on the development of the rural area.

The  $\chi^2$  test shows us that there is no significant relationship between age and the appreciation of the development of the rural area through association and cooperation, knowing that young people have a different perception of the way of life in the rural area compared to the old people, who accept change and the new more difficult in their lives, and this unity of appreciations leads to the conclusion that, regardless of age, the respondents see the association and cooperation in agriculture, as alternatives for economic-social balancing of the rural area.

Regarding the correlation between the size of the farm and the perception of the impact of association and cooperation on the development of the rural area, according to the respondents, it can be found that: the distribution of the respondents' opinion on this item by category of farms is quite balanced, most of those who express a partial agreement they are part of the 10.1 per 50 ha categories, namely 31 respondents, who represent about 33% of those who appreciated this item in this way; the majority of those with full agreement are the respondents who have the farm on an area between 10.1-50 ha, equal to the number of those between 50.1-100 ha, accumulating a percentage of approximately 60% of those who answered this way to this item; regarding those who are dissatisfied, we can say that most of them represent those who have more than 100 ha.

The connection through the  $\chi^2$  test between the two variables is not significant, certifying that the size of the farm has no influence on the perception of the impact of association and cooperation on the development of the rural area.

Its members contribute to the success of a cooperative/associative structure, an aspect that must be taken into account from the start of the establishment procedure, by co-opting the right people, those creative, enterprising people with similar ideas, interests and needs, who regard cooperation and association as an opportunity to make things better.

Regarding the achievement of the objectives, in order to be able to achieve the objectives, all three associative forms elaborated the vision and strategies of the associative structure, made them known in the organization and act according to them. According to the data collected through the questionnaire, regardless of the communication method, written or verbal, all members of the cooperative/producer group/association learned about the organization vision and strategy and are using them.

The development perspectives of the three structures are varied; according to the form of association, they are presented as follows:

- The cooperative's future plans include increasing the number of members, supplying inputs at prices negotiated favorably for members, ensuring the conditions for professional development of members, as well as opening to other national and international organizations, such as UNCSV and COPA COGECA.

- In the case of associations, future plans aim at increasing the number of new members, collaborating with specialized institutions in the territory as well as with civil society to promote agriculture and the correct application of legislation in the field; entering new markets for agricultural products, at national and European

level, organizing/participating in seminars, round tables, trainings with processors and input suppliers; improving farmers' relations with state and private institutions; organizing workshops, debates, to identify and solve farmers' problems, promoting the defense of farmers' professional rights; providing consultancy; organization of trainings, exchange of experience, etc.

-The development prospects of the groups of producers have in mind the planning, orientation and adaptation of production to the market requirements, respecting the conditions of quality and quantity; concentration of the offer and ensuring the valorization of the products obtained by its members; reducing production costs and ensuring stable prices at the producer; a more efficient use of growing and production technologies, as well as waste management, so that they do not harm the environment, ensuring the protection of the quality of water, soil and the natural landscape, maintaining biodiversity.

If through the capitalization process of the cooperative, through common investments at its level, the aim is to gain a competitive position on the single market, under the conditions of a legislative context suitable for a strategic development of the associative structures, the impact on the rural area will be significant, and the support for the members of the structures associations will be visible, in the interest of farmers.