

Three paradigms of cooperative movements with nationalist taxonomy in Transylvania

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Abstract

Three national cooperative movements developed in parallel and simultaneously in Transylvania, during dualism (1867-1918) and the interwar period (1918-1940). The change of regimes and switch of roles altered some components of these organizational paradigms, but typical features remained the same: cooperative movements appeared and developed inside a wider institutional system inherently reproducing and disseminating its value-system. The spectrum of relationships the cooperatives sustained with their 'promoter institutes' comprised self-help, 'help to self-help', state-help or state-control.

The promotion of the cooperative movement by the pre-existing (elder) nationally devoted organizational system explicitly or spontaneously endowed these three cooperative movements with national character. Typically five categories of institution were consequently participating in the promotion of the cooperative movement: savings banks, agricultural and cultural societies, on one side; political parties and state authorities, on the other. The paper focuses on this 'national help to self-help' character of cooperative movements integrated in national programs.

After a synchronic and diachronic comparison of Transylvanian Hungarian, Romanian and Saxon cooperative movements, the researcher agrees with those contemporary cooperative leaders who considered that "ex cathedra" cultural assimilation policies were less efficient compared to the every-day life socialization of ethnic fellows in cooperatives 'embedded' in a national institutional system. These three 'national' cooperative movements from Transylvania reproduced similar features in their internal structure. While state influence and competition for administrative resources reproduced inter-ethnic political conflicts, at the level of both the cooperative member and leadership there was a continuous inter-ethnic communication and mutual influence of organizational paradigms. The main differences amongst them resided in their relative political status: 'dominant majority' or 'non-dominant minority' and their relationship with the state, authorities, promoter-promoted institutes.

The case of the Transylvanian cooperative movements underpins the thesis of Bruckmüller, Fairbairn and Peal, sustaining that state authorities tended to overtake and control mass movements in the process of state-led nationalization favourable for the actual majority.¹ National minorities, in turn, consequently opposed state control in both periods, while the cultural character of promoter and promoted institutions and their 'nationalist taxonomy' inherently conferred the national character of the cooperative movement. The internal cohesion among institutions and organizations from the same national group was paradoxically reinforced by the imminence of state-control and encouraged different non-dominant national entities to develop mutual relationships. While opposing state nationalism, the 'genuine nations' developed a coherent program of nation building without state-help and sometimes against the state relying on 'their proper national wealth' and its programmatic efficient allocation (determination and defence of 'national property', 'national colonization', self-assessment, national eugenics, solidarity among ethnic fellows, among promoters and promoted organizations).

On the basis of the analyzed nationalist narratives, the paper verifies two theses and outlines a typology of 'economic nation-building' and 'national embeddedness' of cooperatives:

The first thesis is that symbolic national patterns preceded economic modernization, while membership in economic and cooperative societies objectified, made active and palpable the national affiliation in quotidian life.

The second thesis is that cooperatives performed four 'channel-functions': 1) a commercial-financial, 2) a cultural-ideological dissemination-channel, 3) an upward- mobility channel and finally 4) a political instrument of mass-mobilization. Both historical periods presented in the paper give arguments and facts illustrating these phenomena inside and among the three national entities cohabitating in Transylvania: Hungarians, Romanians and Saxons.

¹ Bruckmüller, Ernst: Landwirtschaftliche Organisationen und gesellschaftliche Modernisierung. Vereine, Genossenschaften und politische Mobilisierung der Landwirtschaft Österreichs vom Vormärz bis 1914, Salzburg: Neugebauer 1977. Fairbairn, Brett: History from the Ecological Perspective: Gaia Theory and the Problem of Co-operatives in Turn-of-the-Century Germany. In: American Historical Review. Vol. 99. 1994. Nr. 4. pp. 1203-1239. Peal, David: Self-Help and the State. Rural Cooperatives in Imperial Germany, in: Central European History 21 (1988), pp. 244-266.