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Cooperatives in multi-national context



HUNYADI, ATTILA GÁBOR (2016): *Cooperative networks in Transylvania belonging to Hungary and Romania. Nation-building a modernization by cooperatives in Transylvania as part of Hungary (1867–1918) and Romania (1918–1940)*. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, OmniScriptum, Saarbrücken.

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The book offers a longer-term historical investigation about the different forms, characteristics and organization of cooperatives in Transylvania, applying a several disciplinary perspectives. The Author¹ has divided the work into four major parts, although only two of them – the longer ones – have been explicitly nominated as chapters of the book.

¹ The Author, Attila Gábor Hunyadi was born in Turda, Romania in 1977. He finished History studies in Cluj in 2000, earned a PhD in Economic History at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Hungary in 2006 and accomplished Habilitation also in History at the Babes-Bolyai University Cluj in 2015. A former teacher of history, since 2007 the Author works as a lecturer at the History Department of the university in Cluj. Research topics include economic history of Transylvania and Romania in the XX. century, specifically the history of banks, insurance institutions and cooperative movements, self-organization movements of Central and Eastern European minorities, minority rights and societies, and international and regional studies as well.

The first part of the book is labelled as Introduction, which also incorporates a description of the methodological background and the theses and findings of the research. The Author briefly outlines the history of the research area, referring to Transylvania as a historical border region inhabited by ethno-national entities, where a development of sovereign banking and cooperative system could have been witnessed during the 19th century with patterns and examples primarily from Germany, Denmark, Britain and France. A specific dimension of the research problem stems from the fact that Romania in the times of the investigated period consisted of several – at least partially – different traditions and ethno-national entities, and the unification under one single legal system proved to be a remarkable challenge for the country. Accordingly the cooperative networks, the movements – that are in the focus of the investigation – could be interpreted as being in a kind of intermediate situation: on the one hand the leading and coordinating centres of the networks have dominantly gained autonomy regarding for example economic and financial issues, however – on the other hand – they have also had to work under the actual rules of general Romanian policies. Undoubtedly this specific constellation complemented with the diverse cultural and traditional backgrounds of the participating ethno-national groups could have raised the attention of the researcher to make a detailed description of the patterns and historical forms of cooperatives in the region, and to better understand the issue.

In light of this, the researcher has carried out a comparative, interdisciplinary study of the formation, change and restructuring of cooperative networks, which, in addition to exploring the individual forms, can also provide lessons on the mutual effects (‘confluences’), the arrangements and relations of the social actors involved - specifically elites -, and also on the economic agenda followed. This is done in a double temporal division, i.e. by looking separately at the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the times when Transylvania belonged to Romania.

Three main research theses have guided the extensive research. On the one hand, the author assumes that the cooperatives that emerged in the meantime were not organised on an individual basis, but rather collectively, embedded in the operational framework of several different institutions. The book identifies a total of five such institutions, ranging from state administration actors to various non-state institutions such as financial institutions, professional economic associations, political organisations and programmes, and specific non-economic institutions such as churches and cultural institutions. The author refers to this diverse range of actors as promoter institutions.

The second thesis concerns the function of cooperative networks. The author argues that these cooperatives served other non-economic purposes in addition to purely material and financial functions. Such functions, the research suggests, include cultural-ideological channelling, the need for social mobility and the creation and empowerment of an active peasant middle class, and the political mobilisation of the social groups concerned. The research shows that these economic, cultural, social and political functions are interlinked in several cases.

Last but not least the third thesis of the investigation proposes a kind of interaction again – as seen in the case of the former one – but in a different segment. The Author has assumed that there could have been explored a mutual influence between different regional actors and groups regarding the networks of the cooperatives, the leading persons and members of the elite groups, furthermore the national segment in the connected area.

In order to empirically investigate the theses introduced above, the Author follows a historical approach – purposely strictly building on and adhering to the objective facts about the

investigated materials – but also elaborates a specific methodological tool. This methodological model has been created around four elements and is represented – and also applied – in a circular pattern². The *promoters*, the *owners*, *sponsors*, *cadre institutes* and *ruling elites* can be found in the initial phase of the methodological circle – that is, the first step towards the historical investigation of the ethnic-cultural embeddedness of Transylvanian economic institutions is the identification of the key groups of actors. In this stage the historical auxiliary science of prosopography, furthermore elite research and network analysis are to be applied. The next stage of the methodological circle focuses on the study of the self-image of the *firms* and *statues* through the investigation of the names and the languages used inside the boards and assemblies, assigning the methods of database collection and stakeholder analysis. After getting familiar with the essential characteristics of the economic actors, in the third phase the methodological model their targets are to be explored. This process includes the study of the target publics, national identity and PR of the firms in order to illustrate both their explicit and implicit target groups while using qualitative discourse analysis. In the fourth stage called ‘*balance*’ the methodological circle envisages both qualitative and quantitative research methods when investigating the effective activities, and this phase also leads further towards the initial one including the promoters³. The four-stage methodological frame has also been complemented with further methodological assumptions, including the potential of self-coordination of the networks through their inner organizational elements, the consideration of their possible sub-national – intra-national or regional – and supra-national – international, transnational – connections, and an essentially comparative approach. From a methodological perspective the Author does not forget to also emphasize the role of mezzo and macro-level circumstances of regions, and introduces some following consequences in the example of Transylvania. Built on several disciplinarian impressions the research includes perspectives and viewpoints from – among others – sociology, law, economics, internationalism studies, historical ethnography, which provides an interdisciplinary approach⁴.

Based on the conceptual and methodological considerations and framework introduced in the first part of the book – and briefly summarized above – the Author organizes the rather thorough and extensive research results into two chapters. These chapters have been divided along the time-periods of the investigation, so the first chapter covers the economic networks and cooperation in Transylvania in Austria-Hungary. In this part of the book the Reader meets – among others – the Hungarian cooperative system in the Monarchy, the programs of the nationality cooperatives and the roles played by them in the national economies, detailed descriptions and illustrations based on the examples of Romanian, Saxon and Hungarian cooperatives, with a specific attention on the rural areas and peasantry, nationalist theories in economy, target groups and official picture of these processes as reflected in state authority reports.

Chapter 2. titled Economic networks bearing ethnic label (national bias) in interwar Romania includes on the one hand certain further methodological reflections and conceptual considerations regarding cooperation primarily from the perspectives of Romanian economic

² The graphical illustration of methodological model can be found separately also in the first part of the Annexes, in page 100. of the book.

³ The Author of the book assumes that in cases when the four segments illustrate a converging pattern, ideological or ethno-national bias can be assumed of the networks.

⁴ From this perspective the most interesting and also rather relevant approach for the writer of these lines proves to be the economic sociological concepts, as the Author alludes J. Coleman and M. Granovetter.

sociology which make it easier to investigate the research topic and interpret the findings about the patterns of this time period. On the other the second part of this section of the book introduces the economic and cooperative networks and movements with Romanian background and of the national minorities of the country, with an emphasis on the characteristics and patterns of the Hungarian cooperatives, and a further rather interesting sub-chapter can also be found here about the thoughts and relevant consideration of a many-sided scholar, Francis Balázs⁵.

Both chapters are closed with sub-chapters including the concluding remarks related to the investigated period, and the Author decided not to include a further closing chapter of the book about an overall summary and conclusions of the research, but rather has collected and described the research outcomes in the final sub-chapter of the first part of the book containing the introductory conceptual and methodological considerations. In this sub-chapter the outcomes and experiences of the investigations have been reorganized and summarized, where – among others – it has been argued, that there could be explored a pattern of parallel and simultaneous development of Transylvanian national movements, and the changes in times and regimes do not prove to be decisive factor as the typical characteristics remain unchanged regarding the importance of embeddedness into a wider institutional- and value system. The research outcomes imply four different relationships and five different institution types while considering the similarities and specific features of the investigated cooperatives, and it can also be added, that the most remarkable difference could have been found in the relative political status of the groups involved and – accordingly – the way they were connected to the state and authorities. In this summarizing sub-chapter again three theses have been mentioned – referring to the initial theses of the research –, arguing that the national character plays an important role in the cooperative movements, the cooperatives prove to have several functions while ‘channelling’ not only financial, but cultural-ideological, mobility-related and political resources as well. In a state-relations context the study confirms the assumption of modern economic historiographical research about that cooperative movements of minorities are to be controlled by the dominant state, and the examples introduced in the study – particularly the case of Transylvania – illustrate that the cooperative movements served as an area of opposition to state control while developing coherent programs also important from the perspective of nation-building.

The study incorporates rich historical data collected and investigated in a thorough and methodical approach, the results of the studies are frequently illustrated by different graphic methods – tables, figures, maps as well – installed partially in the closing sub-chapters regarding the two different periods, and in dominantly the Annexes following the second chapter. It should also be highlighted, that the numerous sources used during the investigations are presented in the – 34-pages long (!) – bibliography in a divided manner where lists of different kinds of sources – e. g. archival sources, editions, legislations, press documents – can be reviewed and studied in light of the proper interest of the Reader.

Those who wish to gain deep professional insights into the historical development, patterns and wider social embeddedness of cooperatives in inter-ethnic and trans-national contexts definitely find an excellent work if they choose the book by Attila Gábor Hunyadi, but scholars from different other related disciplines and even any interested ones might also encounter relevant parts in the book and research findings worth to be considered.

⁵ Francis Balázs (1901–1937) was a Transylvanian poet and writer, philosopher and social reformer with significant international experience who had his ideas about cooperative also realized in practice.