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המרכז הבין-לאומי לחקר קהילות כפריות שיתופיות

CIRCOM

CIRCOM, International Research Centre on Rural Cooperative Communities was established in September 1965 in Paris.

The purpose of the Centre is to provide a framework for investigations and research on problems concerning rural cooperative communities and publication of the results, to coordinate the exchange of information on current research projects and published works, and to encourage the organization of symposia on the problems of cooperative rural communities, as well as the exchange of experts between different countries.

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Reactions of Spanish Farm Cooperatives to Globalization: Ideal Discourse Types

by

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to build up a typology of the ideological discourses which guide and legitimize the different, and often mutually contradictory, reactions of Spanish farm cooperatives to the processes of ever-increasing socio-economic globalization in which they are immersed. In accordance with this typology, in which we have followed a criterion similar to Max Weber's, we distinguish four ideal ideological discourse types. These go along a continuum from those which stress a more or less egalitarian mutualism, which has traditionally characterized cooperatives, to those which tend to look towards efficiency and managerial competitiveness. Although it focuses on the situation occurring in Spain, the analysis strategy adopted in the present work could be applied to the study of the reactions of farm cooperatives in other countries in similar socio-economic circumstances.

Introduction

The feeling that we live in a global world has been growing, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's *de facto* conversion to the capitalist system, which for the first time ever has spread over the whole planet. In this context, the present globalization processes have brought with them the transnationalization of capital flows, the privatization and deregulation of national economies and the decline of socialist policies, as well as an increase in job insecurity and unemployment, and, in short, growing social exclusion. This is shown in a tendency towards a sharpening of the inequalities between North and South, between the Center and the Periphery, and in the gradual reduction of the services of the so called "Welfare State" as well as a rise in the levels of polarization and social marginalization in the heart of traditionally "developed" societies, threatening the stability of social systems.

In these societies, problems and possible solutions are overmore subject to unpredictable forces operating at a global level. Consequently, at the present time, social actors in local or regional communities are undergoing a set of socio-economic processes which are ever more out of their control and initiated or conditioned

by distant and alien decisions or interests. In this way, practically the whole of the world's population is today immersed in a single global society (Albrow, 1990:9). In a nutshell, the local is quickly giving way to the global, so that we are seeing a burgeoning of different national and transnational organizations, as well as movements and institutions which have made frontiers between societies more permeable and open to outside influences (Robertson, 1993:5). Globalization manifests itself at socio-economic, political institutional and symbolic legitimizing levels (Entrena, 1996). In the socio-economic vein, we may observe a rise in emigration and immigration flows and the tendency towards the globalization of market forces to go beyond the national level to a world one, as well as innumerable difficult-to-regulate commercial and financial transactions. This makes for an ever-increasing "monetarization" of the economy, which in turn gives rise to a preponderance of financial as against productive capital. Currency markets and movements of capital are now more important than goods or service markets. Politico-institutionally, the spread of networks of national and transnational relations and institutions is bringing about the gradual loss of sovereignty and leeway on the part of nation states (Held, 1991:178-179). Lastly, regarding symbolic legitimizing aspects, society is becoming culturally more standardized and exposed to such a deluge of messages and ideas that one of the results is the relativism and uncertainty of our postmodern era.

The effects of globalization on the agrarian sector

Given its traditionally disadvantaged socio-economic position, the profound crises, conflicts and uncertainties issuing from current globalization processes are usually felt more acutely in the agrarian sector. For example, in the relatively local European arena, the classic Fordist model (*i.e.*, the production of homogenous goods on a massive scale) is being slowly replaced by a new one which, among other things, stresses the search for quality, specialization and competitiveness. Such is post-Fordism, which is ever more linked to an economic scenario on a planetary scale, in which "competitiveness" imposed by large transnational corporations rules supreme. Needless to say, these corporations are gradually exerting more and more control over every link in the agro-food chain.

In 1985, Spain's membership into what was then known as the European Economic Community (EEC), contributed to the acceleration of the globalization process which had started decades before. Recent crucial developments have all had a hand in this process, such as the advent of the single market, the implementation of the Reform of the Community Agrarian Policy (CAP) in 1992, with a gradual loss of its protectionist policies, as well as the end of the GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) negotiations (El enigma del... , 1994).

More specifically, the CAP Reform has been undertaken with aims such as:

- discouraging the accumulation of surpluses as well as restricting spending, which is resulting in a notable reduction in farming of certain products in many areas and which is forcing farmers to turn to other ones. Also more and more nonagricultural activities are being set up in rural areas;
- balancing out protection among regions and producers of the European Union;
- developing an income policy through structural reforms aimed at compensating the gradual dismantling of former price guaranteeing measures;
- the modification of the European system of customs and levies, which is taking European agrarian products ever more into the arena of international competition. Since the advent of the single market (1st January 1993), the borders of European Union countries have become more and more permeable. As this market becomes more established, Spain is feeling the effects of increased commercial pressure caused by products from other European countries which are usually more competitive;
- environmental protection and development of extensive farming with sustainable agriculture;
- maintaining the numbers of European rural population, with measures to avoid the aging of its demographic structure.

All in all, the CAP Reform is an example of how European agrarian policies are being impelled to adapt to growing worldwide standardization, extension and integration of the production, processing and commercialization of agrarian produce, which has turned agriculture into a globalized industry (Le Heron, 1993). In this situation, consumers are ever more concerned about the quality and health value of food. This occurs to a large extent because food production and commercialization processes are more and more out of consumers' control. As well, greater competition gives rise to the increased need for services related to the product and for the importance of marketing, whose adequate use is essential to successful commercialization.

Economic globalization and the setting up of cooperatives in Spain

Small and medium-sized farmers have traditionally joined together in cooperatives as a way of protecting their interests against intermediaries and companies that furnish the inputs they need for their land (Pérez Yruela, 1990:224). In the evolution of Spanish farm cooperatives, we must mention how Catholic unions, which were a part of the National Catholic Agrarian Confederation, came to the fore at the beginning of the century. These continued to spread until the 1930s, especially over the area which is now the Autonomous Community of Castilla-León. After the Civil War (1936–39), the General Cooperatives Law came into force, under which many cooperatives were started in the 1950s and 1960s and remain to this day (Monzón y Barea, 1991).

On the death of General Franco, in 1975, the restoration of democracy allowed greater freedom of association, which in its turn meant that many more farm cooperatives sprung up in the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s. Even so, it is the rapid globalization process felt in the Spanish economy over the last decades that is behind this recent burgeoning of cooperatives, which to a large extent is a reaction to the crises, challenges and also opportunities afforded by this process.

In the face of current economic liberalization processes, which have become all the more severe under the GATT and CAP reforms, cooperatives are coming to the fore as instruments of defending and organizing producers. This is especially so in the light of the commercialization problems posed in markets which are becoming ever less controlled (García Azcarate, 1992). These processes are also behind the springing up of new cooperatives, which, like existing ones, may be considered as associations reacting against the productive commercial requirements, growing competitiveness and socio-economic imbalance born of globalization.

A common denominator of cooperatives is that they are enterprises which strive to avoid antagonism between management and worker. In other words, they are enterprises in which the worker has become a manager while still carrying out executive tasks, or, if you wish, the manager has ceased to contract wage earning workers and he substitutes them himself both individually and collectively (Carrasco, 1993:27). What is more, profit sharing and the decision-making process are not governed by the competitiveness criteria inherent in capitalism. Rather, they may be considered in general as enterprises which, in the face of these criteria and the insolidarity prevalent in the global capitalist market, are based on mutualist principles which make them a paradigm of enterprises of social economy (Barea, 1991).

The recent development of Spanish agrarian cooperativism has come about behind the back of the trade union movement. They have not worked together in the same way as is so often the case in other European countries, such as Denmark or Belgium (Moyano, 1993(a):448-493 and following). By comparison, our agrarian cooperativism is still having more problems in its development. Its economic weight is most pronounced in the first links of the commercialization chain, but as products approach the consumer, the importance of cooperatives diminishes to the benefit of the agro-food industries and above all large transnational corporations, which are taking over the final stage of food commercialization and distribution to the consumer.

In the present global arena, cooperatives have been considered to be market regulators (Martín Zarco, 1993:54). Although their number and importance vary significantly among autonomous communities and according to different productive sectors [Table 1 and Figure 1 (a and b)], all the farm cooperatives together make the largest food group in Spain, with an average annual turnover of 250 million pesetas each cooperative (UPA, 1994:60). But in general, the levels of their pooled offer are

low in comparison to those of the European Union. Even where most cooperatives abound, lack of coordinated strategies means that they have little influence on the market.

In the current global situation of fewer production incentives, decreasing turnovers and falls in prices are two of the major problems affecting Spanish farm cooperatives today. As regards financing and management, we must point out their low levels of capital and reserves in comparison with the average of other Spanish firms.

Enterprises that are unfettered by mutualism so prevalent in cooperatives can increase their profit margins in the present globalized situation with its characteristic stocks and food surpluses, by pressurizing suppliers to lower their prices. Their offer is distended and disorganized. In the same way, these firms are free to shop around and choose high quality products or in accordance with demand.

Table 1. Distribution of farm cooperatives over autonomous communities (see map on next page)

Autonomous community	Number of farm cooperatives	Number of members
Andalucía	1.107	310.355
Aragón	282	110.268
Asturias	116	25.618
Baleares	45	6.867
Canarias	122	25.672
Cantabria	30	10.878
Castilla-La Mancha	517	189.794
Castilla y León	568	132.551
Cataluña	518	130.681
Valencia	670	369.926
Extremadura	459	67.921
Galicia	356	75.941
Madrid	71	8.764
Murcia	82	43.351
Navarra	205	42.386
Pas Vasco	152	2.749
La Rioja	76	17.081
TOTAL	5.376	1.570.803

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (SAC, 1995:54).

Cooperatives, on the other hand, cannot do this. They are usually at a disadvantage, therefore, precisely because their members are both farmers and suppliers at the same time. Cooperatives came into being to create outlets for their produce, and their crucial objective, rather than managerial profit, is to defend farmers and increase their income. This means involvement with production

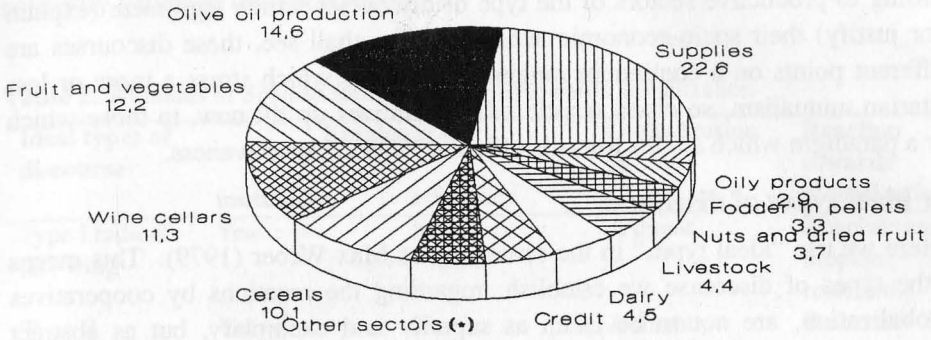
problems and those of the producers themselves. Even though this assures steady supplies to the market, this guarantee tends to be economically harmful to the cooperatives themselves, in this global situation in which food mountains abound.

Figure 1. Map of autonomous communities of Spain

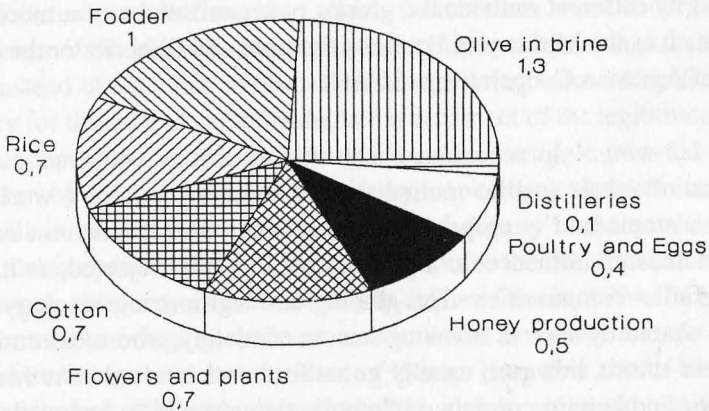


Figure 2. Cooperativism in Spain

(a) Sectors in percentages



(b) Other sectors in percentages



As important production and distribution actors, cooperatives are seeing how present globalization is making ever more numerous, difficult and complex demands on the productive processes in which they are involved. In this situation, many Spanish cooperatives are questioning their social and productive roles. The structures and strategies adopted (or under consideration) by cooperatives vary significantly according to productive sectors or the type of discourses which legitimize (explain and/or justify) their socio-economic action. As we shall see, these discourses are at different points on a continuum ranging from those which stress a more or less egalitarian mutualism, so characteristic of cooperatives up till now, to those which favor a paradigm which strives towards efficiency and competitiveness.

Four ideal types of discourse

Here we use “ideal types” in the same way as Max Weber (1979). This means that the types of discourse we establish, regarding the reactions by cooperatives to globalization, are not to be taken as superior and exemplary, but as abstract “pure types” which will serve as analytical models, to classify the diversity of real discourses made by or about these associations. Evidently none of these real discourses is completely covered by any one of the ideal models. Rather, they approach them to a greater or lesser extent. Any farm cooperative will have some of the characteristics of all four types, but in socio-economic reality, it will gravitate towards one of them in particular.

Though focused on the Spanish situation, the typology of discourses we propose here can be easily applied to the study of reactions by farm cooperatives in other countries undergoing similar globalization processes. Obviously, the character of these discourses depends on factors such as the size and structure of the cooperatives from which they spring, the ideological inclinations of their members or the socio-institutional position of the agents who construct each discourse. In view of all this, in the typology we have developed (Table 2), we have taken into account discourses made by members about what is considered to be or should be the action of farm cooperatives and by different individuals, groups or organizations of a more or less official nature, such as the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries or the Spanish Confederation of Agrarian Cooperatives (SCAC).

Type I: radical left-wing. In accordance with this discourse, cooperatives should be the expression of values such as mutualism and solidarity in a new world. This is perceived as a utopia and is proposed as an alternative to the current capitalist system whose increasing influence on a global scale is totally rejected, as it is seen as a threat to agrarian communities. The guiding and legitimizing ideology behind this discourse is shared by several left-wing sectors of society, whose extremism and anti-establishment stance, however, usually go no further than words. At this end of the scale we even find certain currents of Catholic thought which find a confluence

between the solidarity values of cooperativism and their radical interpretation of the socially supportive values of the Catholic doctrine of Pope Leo XIII. Likewise, it is easier to understand this view of cooperativism held by some Catholics if we take into account the role played by certain priests, such as the Jesuit father José María Arizmendiarrreta (1994), who infused the Spanish cooperative scheme with the solidarity values of this social doctrine.

Table 2. Attitudes of Spanish farm cooperatives towards globalization

Ideal types of discourse	Emphasis on		Globalization is:	Reaction towards globalization
	mutualism	efficiency		
Type I radical left-wing	Yes	No	A threat	Absolute and utopian rejection
Type II moderate left-wing	Yes	No	A threat	Reformist rejection
Type III managerial	No	Yes	A challenge	Instrumental adaptation
Type IV official line	Yes	Yes	A reality of our time	Instrumental adaptation

Source: Authors

As a paradigmatic example of this kind of discourse, we make reference here to the case of the “Cooperativa Industrial San Marcos”. It is situated in the Serranía de Ronda (Málaga) and makes cured meat products (Sánchez García, 1994). According to one of its members, it produces, processes and distributes its products in a way that is far more egalitarian than would be the case if they used ordinary capitalist methods. Here, cooperation and solidarity are put forward as strategies for carrying out Christian values and as an expression of the struggle for a new world. The great self-exploitation and self-sacrifice which its members must undergo are seen as a consequence of the inhuman competitiveness imposed by the unjust capitalist system, which, instead of attending to needs and strengthening values of solidarity, strives for efficiency for the sake of capital gain, to the detriment of the legitimate profit of work.

This cooperative understands its work to be a struggle to avoid “the small fish being eaten by the big fish” (*i.e.*, its enemy, capitalism). It takes into consideration “the small in all its capacity, capability and dignity”. More than an economic scheme, the cooperative is seen as a framework for the development of honesty, self-management, solidarity and democracy (Sánchez García, 1994:1011). Its members are committed to bringing about a transformation in society and, as far as possible, an improvement in their own standard of living. They also aim to be an example for the establishment of other cooperatives who wish to act as alternatives to the *status quo*. For they consider that:

even a tiny ant in an elephant's ear (the author is obviously referring to the capitalist system) can be extremely uncomfortable; not to mention two tiny ants; and why say what would happen if three, or four tiny. . . (Sánchez García, 1994:10).

Type II: moderate left-wing. Here the emphasis is also on the mutualist character of cooperatives. These are proposed as an alternative which reinforces solidarity as a means of defense or a way of redressing imbalances, maladjustments and other threats of capitalist globalization. Nevertheless, in contrast to the anti-system position of the previous type, this one adopts a reformist stance. According to this discourse, in a society in which there is unemployment and crisis, cooperatives must strive towards freeing farmers from exploitation and instability, and redress the disadvantaged situation of the rural population. To this end, the cooperative must find, or if necessary create, a human means of achieving a social unit cohesive enough to allow mutual trust among its members (Salinas, 1987:5-6).

This is the point of view of certain sectors of the moderate left, who consider that the State ought to encourage the setting up and development of cooperatives as a way of enabling farmers to take part in the commercialization and industrialization of agrarian production, which as a consequence of globalization is more and more out of their control (Alternativas para el . . . , 1993:23).

Although these sectors are aware of the need for cooperatives to adapt in their search for efficiency and other socio-economic demands of globalization, in reality, however, they tend to stress mutualist principles, for they believe that this is the only way to stop them from becoming merely mercantile associations who subordinate their social duties to purely economic ends. One example of this type of discourse is the vision of cooperatives seen in a study entitled *Analysis of the conflict inside farm cooperatives and strategies for overcoming them* (Díaz, 1993). It was financed by the "Banco de Crédito Agrícola" and carried out by the Largo Caballero Trust, which is linked to the General Workers' Union (UGT) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).

Type III: managerial. Here, farm cooperatives are conceived as real enterprises in their own right, which above all must work towards efficiency, even if this means sacrificing the mutualism which traditionally has been at the heart of these kinds of social economy (Ballester, 1990). Productive and commercial re-adjustments are seen as a challenge. And the best way of reacting is an instrumental attitude to seek the most advantageous means of adapting to them. This perception of cooperative strategies points out the financial difficulties and the obstacles in the way of organizing their production in the most advantageous and profitable way possible and in accordance with the dominant capitalist model. The acceptance of the cooperative society as a proper business means questioning some of its ideological

bases, at least as far as their so called "cooperative principles" are concerned. Between these principles and cooperative practice, the gap is widening every day, not only in neighboring European countries, but in Spain itself (Juliá, 1994:244).

An example of this perception of farm cooperatives was to be heard in one of the official presentations given at the First Farm Cooperatives Congress, held in Madrid in October, 1993:

Farm cooperatives are facing a common crisis. On top of the difficulties they have as food-producing businesses, there are having problems with their members, their inevitable involvement with agrarian production and the rural setting, as well as their peculiarities as far as decision-taking is concerned. We must diagnose ourselves from within and be above all self-critical. We must analyze the problems of our environment in order to face up to them and our own shortcomings. Only then will we be able to define the individual and collective performance which will allow cooperatives to adapt to their new surroundings (Borrás, 1993:68).

This type of discourse reflects a tendency to stress the managerial character of cooperatives, which is widespread all over the European Union. Over the last few years, Spanish agrarian cooperativism has been taking on some managerial aspects of the European model, in spite of considerable legal and social difficulties. This has been most pronounced in fruit and vegetable production sectors, especially citrus fruits, which are precisely the most recently established cooperatives. But cooperatives as enterprises are still less abundant than in Europe and are centered mainly on second degree cooperatives, that is, cooperative enterprises which are a kind of umbrella organization for other cooperatives (Montero, 1991). At the present time, there are more than a hundred cooperatives of this kind. About 80 percent of them were started in the 1980s, and those devoted to supplying inputs and marketing fruit and vegetables are the most well developed.

In practice, cooperative enterprises organized into one or more branches are the most favored model in Spain. Each of them is named after the kind of activity performed. So there is a clear predominance of cooperatives with more than one branch, and among these, it is most usual to find cooperatives with production, supplies, marketing and/or processing sections. This is a different model from the Dutch one for example, which is much more specialized, and in which products are supplied by service cooperatives and sold by marketing ones, such as auction hall cooperatives (Juliá, 1991).

The growing adoption by farm cooperatives of managerial type behavior and discourses is explained to a large extent by their need to adapt to the new post-Fordist quality requirements, as well as compete in an increasingly more globalized market operating in accordance with the demands of large transnational corporations. In Spain, where food production is in a stage of growth, concentration and

internationalization, the influence of these corporations is on the increase (Abad y García, 1990:154 and following), even though the concentration of food production firms delivering directly to the consumer is still well below the European average.

But the adaptation by cooperatives to these new global circumstances is bringing about numerous psycho-sociological contradictions. So, despite the widespread tendency to opt for a managerial discourse in line with the deregulating principles of the global market, many of these cooperatives feel defenseless and threatened by their most important customers: large transnational agro-food corporations who distribute to the consumer (UPA, 1994:113). This usually leads cooperatives to demand State support, such as tax relief, and especially measures to regulate relations with these corporations. The contradiction here is manifest: you cannot demand more commercial freedom and at the same time more state intervention.

Type IV: official line. Here we see the typical ambivalence or rather “polyvalence” of discourses made by officialdom or by certain organizations representing a variety of interests, such as managerial organizations or workers’ unions of modern cooperatives, whose labor structure is so complex that it is difficult to define what has traditionally been conceived as proletariat. This polyvalence, whether by accident or design, enables different social sectors, however contradictory they may be, to feel that they are an integral part of what is said or represented by the official stance, which thereby legitimizes and/or asserts its hegemony or influence over them.

As regards Spanish farm cooperatives, this kind of ambivalent discourse is seen in a tendency to reconcile contradictory factors trying to stress their traditional mutualist character on the one hand, and their present demands of competition and managerial efficiency, on the other. These are understood as instrumental attitudes in order to achieve, in the most profitable possible way, the adaptation of farm cooperatives to the requirements of increasing socio-economic globalization of the agrarian world, conceived as an inescapable reality of our time.

The SCAC’s conception of farm cooperatives fits in with the official-line type, for although within this Confederation there is a great diversity of groups with different interests and ideological tendencies, we are seeing how they are tending to come together for the sake of showing a united front (Moyano, 1993(b)). The polyvalent character of this stance of the SCAC may be explained as the result of its need to live up to its organizing role, which represents and integrates the heterogeneous and often contradictory interests and objectives of the many farm cooperatives which make up the bulk of its membership. This integrative vision is also shared by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture (Política de apoyo al. . ., 1990). So, the polyvalent nature of this government body towards farm cooperatives is in accordance with its need to respond to the contradictory interests and claims made by the cooperatives themselves. It is not surprising, therefore, that while this Ministry adopts measures to support or give incentives to cooperative mutualism, it also sees the need to

carry out the necessary legislative and fiscal modifications to improve managerial efficiency and adaptation of cooperatives to present-day globalization. To this end, the following objectives are seen as crucial: concentrating agrarian income, achieving a sufficient commercial dimension or typifying products, thereby making a successful impact on the market (SAC, 1995:53).

In conclusion: the dilemma between cooperative mutualism and managerial efficiency

Each one of the four ideal discourse types outlined above has a different view of what is, or ought to be, the reaction and the role of cooperative associations towards the challenges of re-structuring and change brought about by the progressive involvement of farm production and marketing in the increasingly competitive socio-economic whirlpool of the global market. Rather than discuss the internal workings of cooperatives, we have discussed their discourses in the face of the rapid and unforeseeable changes occurring in the growing socio-economic globalization of these times.

In this situation, some cooperatives, such as those in type I, are a model of resistance to and rejection of the system. Others, for example type III, try to adapt as best they can to present globalization circumstances, and use them to their maximum advantage. These adopt a discourse of a managerial nature in accordance with the model of market economy which is prevalent world wide.

The visions of types I and II coincide with the traditional idea that cooperatives are for organizing production on the mutualist principles inherent in socialism. Both visions seem to ignore, or at least insufficiently stress in the second case, the real consequences of globalization which is putting more and more obstacles in the way of independent action by farm cooperatives. These, both as social actors and as economic groups who are key links in the agro-food chain, at a regional and even state level, are under increasing pressure from transnational agro-food companies, whose global tentacles are progressively penetrating Spanish food commerce.

In these circumstances, the behavior of cooperatives which act in accordance with a managerial-type discourse, appears to be the most profitable way of using their relations with agro-industry and transnational agro-food corporations. It must be said, however, that this kind of behavior on the part of cooperatives tends to relegate their very *raison d'être*, mutualist cooperativism, to second place. In many cases, they cease to be the paradigmatic mutualistic champions of social economy. They remain as cooperatives in the formal sense only, and in practice work as if they were full-fledged business enterprises.

To a large extent, the conflict within cooperatives stems from this tug-of-war between managerial and mutualist discourses. The intrinsic solidarity of cooperative association is a way of collectively facing up to the competitive challenges of an ever-more globalized agrarian economy, increasingly taken over by large transnational

agro-food corporations. Even so, cooperatives need to adopt managerial-type socio-economic behavior in order to become established and succeed in today's market conditions. This usually leads to strict economism and a loss of cooperativism along the way. Somehow, they have to reconcile this dilemma between cooperation and competition.

In conclusion, under the circumstances in which the world of agriculture and the whole of Spanish rural society is undergoing a process of intense globalization and subsequent socio-economic re-structuring, we observe a profound modification in the nature and role of cooperatives. These are experiencing anomic situations, and have expectations of efficiency and progress, as well as uncertainty, dilemmas and contradictions which stem from incessantly having to question and rebuild their roles and objectives. As we have seen, while globalization and the ensuing increased competitiveness encourage the development of cooperativism on the one hand, they also encourage cooperatives to compete more and become business enterprises. As a consequence, these tend to lose their essence of solidarity.

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