


Article

Democratic Administration and Commitment of Members of Agricultural Cooperatives: A Case Study from a Prefecture in Greece

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Abstract: Cooperatives are democratic organizations, governed and controlled by their members, who are actively involved in their policy-making and decision-making process. The aim of this paper is to investigate the correlation between cooperative culture and the way that cooperatives are governed. To this end, a probability sampling method is used in the agricultural cooperatives of the Greek prefecture of Larissa, which is one of the most powerful and dynamic in the agricultural economy. The data collection was carried out to 100 members of agricultural cooperatives through the use of a closed-ended questionnaire. The findings highlighted that agricultural cooperatives are distinguished for their increased level of cooperative culture and commitment, provided that the conditions for the democratic governance of cooperatives are met. The role played by the level of education of the members of the agricultural cooperatives was also important, thus confirming the main purpose of the research, which was none other than to prove this correlation. Finally, this correlation can lead to the improvement of certain elements which contribute to the optimization of agricultural governance.

Keywords: agricultural economy; anthropocentrism; commitment; cooperatives; democracy; governance; education; Greece; members



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1. Introduction

The institution of the agricultural cooperative has its roots in ancient times. It has always played a very important and crucial role in representing members-farmers in the supply chain [1]. The supply chain includes the producer, the processor, the wholesaler, the retailer and, finally, the consumer. So, a cooperative is an autonomous association of individuals formed voluntarily to address their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a co-administered and democratically governed enterprise [2,3].

The success of the cooperatives within the competitive structure of the market depends on various factors. In addition to the skills of its executives, it presupposes the existence of social capital that is proven by the presence of characteristics such as trust, reciprocity, commitment and the active participation of its members [4]. This is important for the active participation of the members of the cooperative because it includes many of the characteristics of social capital, such as the cooperative culture, the open communication between members and management, the trust of members in the management of the cooperative, the involvement of members with the affairs of the cooperative and the desire to take an active part in the day-to-day affairs of the cooperative [5]. However, to achieve the active participation of the members in the cooperative, the existence of all these characteristics is necessary.

In addition, the value of democracy that governs the institution of cooperatives contributes to the strengthening of the role of members and leads to their full commitment

to it [6]. The value of democracy is a characteristic choice of cooperatives and a proof of the anthropocentrism of the cooperative institution, which controls and subordinates the economic operation to the person who places it in the center of his interest, recognizing in his person rights and obligations [7]. Democracy is a key component of the cooperative idea and is expressed in the fundamental cooperative principle of “democratic administration of cooperatives”, which is manifested in: (a) democratic procedures for the election of boards such as the Board of Directors and (b) in the general meetings, where decisions are also taken based on the principle of majority [8].

This paper aims to investigate the way that cooperatives governed affect the commitment of the members. To achieve the aim of the paper, an on-site survey was conducted in the agricultural cooperatives of the prefecture of Larissa. In the survey, 100 cooperative members participated, who were asked to complete a closed-ended questionnaire based on the 7-point Likert scale. The results showed that the democratic way of governing cooperatives leads its members to their full commitment, ignoring any new opportunity offered to them by a competing cooperative. However, it is interesting that despite the loyalty of the members to the cooperative, they do not seem to want to be involved in positions of responsibility. This is a critical issue and requires significant investigation into how cooperatives ultimately encourage their members to take on these key positions [9].

2. Literature Review

2.1. *The Role of Democracy in Cooperatives*

The value of democracy is a distinctive choice of cooperatives and a proof of the anthropocentrism of the cooperative institution, which submits the economic function to the human capital, whom it considers as the focus of its interest and to whom it recognizes rights and obligations [5,10]. Democracy is a key component of the cooperative idea and can be expressed through: (i) democratic procedures for the election of boards of directors, (ii) the distribution of positions among elected members of the Board of Directors and (iii) general assemblies, where decisions are taken based on the majority [3]. So, based on the principle of Democratic Governance of Cooperatives, cooperatives are defined as: “democratic organizations, which are managed and controlled by their members, which actively participate in the formulation of their policy and decision-making” [1].

The members of the cooperatives have the right and the duty to participate in the cooperative governance. In practice, this obligation may take the form of statutory minimum attendance of members at general meetings or even the imposition of exclusion penalties in the case of their permanent absence [11]. Given that most international cooperative laws allow or even require that the governance of the cooperative be exercised by an appointed Board of Directors, the obligation of the partners to participate in the governance often extends to participation in the meetings of the General Assembly [12].

However, what is certain is that democratic control consists of the members of the cooperatives having the decisive power over every important and strategically important issue of the cooperative [4]. Some of the common issues that may arise are the appointments for the composition of the Board of Directors, the amendments to the articles of association, the mergers, the splits, as well as their dissolution. According to the International Cooperative Alliance, the distinction between the important issues decided by the partners themselves and the other issues assigned to the board of directors is an issue for which each cooperative is called to decide.

In addition, the democratic nature of cooperative governance refers to the principle of majority, which applies to all decision-making processes [13]. This includes the obligation of the members to respect the will of the majority, if not acting against the law or the statute of the cooperative or with the abuse of its power. On the other hand, the rights of the minority are protected by the right to information and questions about the issues of the cooperative, even with the help of legal advisers, through whom the partners can control both the Board of Directors and the majority of the General Assembly [7].

2.2. Cooperatives and Member Commitment

The role of the members of cooperatives is crucial for their development and smooth governance. Increasing the participation of members in the decision-making process best confirms the democratic operation of cooperatives. However, members' commitment is vital, too, as it contributes to the success of the cooperatives and is strongly connected with their sustainability.

International literature provides various definitions of member commitment. In the context of member commitment, Fulton & Adamowicz (1993) refer to member patronage to the cooperative, which can be seen as a form of loyalty, as it highlights that plenty of a member's transactions are conducted in the same cooperative [14]. The term patronage (protection) seems to go beyond commitment and includes elements of trust. In contrast, Bijman & Verhees (2011) refer to customer engagement in supply cooperatives, where its meaning is defined by three aspects: (i) effort, (ii) identification and (iii) dedication [6]. Commitment is related to that part of the commitment that measures the farmer's willingness to continue to protect the supplier. Cechin et al. (2013) distinguish two types of commitments [15]. On the one hand, they define commitment as the collective action in which a member is willing to commit to the cooperative, placing the interest of the cooperative above the interest of the member. On the other hand, the commitment to a customer-oriented strategy is analyzed, in the sense that a member is positive towards a customer-oriented cooperative strategy and focuses on vertical coordination in the supply chain.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Population and Sample

The target population of this study were individuals aged 18 years and over, who are members of agricultural cooperatives in the prefecture of Larissa in Greece (Table 1). The sample consists of 100 people, with most of them coming from the age group of 41–50 years (29%). Over half of the participants are males (75%) and 45% of them have work experience in cooperatives of 11–25 years. Predominantly, the educational level of the members is secondary education (60%), while 21% of them have higher education and 19% have basic education.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Variables	Scale	Frequency (f)	Relative Frequency (Rf)
Gender	Male	75	0.75
	Female	25	0.25
Age	≤30	14	0.14
	31–40	14	0.14
	41–50	29	0.29
	51–60	23	0.23
	61>	20	0.20
	≤10	41	0.41
Years of cooperative activity	11–25	43	0.43
	26>	16	0.16
Current Position in Cooperative	Member	84	0.84
	Board member	15	0.15
	Basic education	19	0.19
Education level	Secondary education	60	0.60
	Higher education	21	0.21

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

A quantitative methodological approach was used in this study. Questionnaire of closed-ended questions was the main tool for data collection and it was apart from two sections. The first section referred to the demographics of the participants and included

five questions regarding their gender, age, years of cooperative activity, current position in cooperatives and level of education. The second section of the questionnaire included 20 questions. The first 10 questions were related to the level of the cooperative culture of the members and the following 10 concerned the attitude-belief of the member towards the way the cooperative operates. All these questions were rated on a 7-point Likert frequency scale (1—strongly disagree to 7—strongly agree).

Regarding the investigation of the degree of cooperative culture of the members, the individuals who participated in the research were asked to answer 10 key questions, such as the statement of the degree that they consider to be closely related to the cooperative to which they belong. Members were also asked if they had considered leaving the cooperative they belonged to during their partnership and if they would continue to belong to it if they received an invitation to join another cooperative. Lastly, questions regarding the investigation of the degree of agreement of the members with the principles of each cooperative and their declaration of willingness to invest their future funds to support the cooperative were some more questions, which contributed positively to the examination of the cooperative culture of the members.

The second set of questions (10 questions) were focused on the investigation of the attitude-belief of the member towards the governance of the cooperatives. In this part, the participants were asked to answer questions which related to their intention to take future management positions in the cooperative they belong to or even to take a position of responsibility outside the articles of association of the cooperative. As communication is an important factor in the governance of cooperatives, members were asked to state the extent to which they consider their communication with other members of the cooperative to be good or not. Finally, the decision-making process is an important and crucial issue that concerns most cooperatives. So, this section included questions related to the degree of participation of members in the decision-making bodies of cooperatives such as the General Assembly and the participation of members in the strategic planning process.

Finally, the questionnaire was checked for its viability and reliability. Table 2 lists the reliability and descriptive statistical measures of the research scales. The internal coherence reliability of the scales was assessed with the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The value of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.855, which characterizes as very good the reliability and coherence of the questionnaire. The score for the Survey Questions scale ranges from 2.00 to 6.63 with an average value of 5.02 (standard deviation = 1.104), which indicates normal levels for most of the sample.

Table 2. Reliability statistics.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Variance
Item variances	0.855	2.00	6.63	5.02	1.104

Source: Own elaboration.

3.3. Procedures

For the collection of data, field research was conducted in agricultural cooperatives in the prefecture of Larissa, which belongs to the Region of Thessaly in Greece. The data collection period lasted from June 2019 to December 2019. However, in May 2019 a pilot survey was conducted which contributed to the correction and identification of some defects of the questionnaire.

The sampling process was performed by the method of convenience sampling. The convenience method is a process contributing to the creation of a kind of sample of volunteers, who are receptive and willing to participate in the research. This method was followed in the current study to form the required sample, which was finally apart from 100 members from agricultural cooperatives in the prefecture of Larissa.

The completion of the questionnaire was anonymous, while the field research took place in two phases. In the first phase, pilot research was carried out, which lasted one month (May 2019). During this phase, 10 cooperative members were willing to com-

plete the questionnaire in order for the authors to proceed with the appropriate corrections/improvements of the questionnaire. The validity of the content of the questionnaire, was checked by the authors, too. In the second and last phase, which lasted 6 months (June–December 2019), the data collection took place, which was conducted by distributing the questionnaires to the members of the agricultural cooperatives that were selected to participate in the research. The distribution of the questionnaires was made by the researchers. In addition, the questionnaire was accompanied by a full text that described the purpose and object of the research, while there was an extensive reference to ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the data.

To perform the data processing, IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software was used, and descriptive statistics techniques were used to describe the sample and perform the descriptive analysis of the variables that characterize the members of the agricultural cooperatives and their commitment to them. To investigate possible correlations, an inductive analysis was performed. In the scales that followed the normal distribution, the parametric tests χ^2 -test, t -test and ANOVA were performed, while in the scales that did not follow the normal distribution, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test was performed. The significance level was set at 5%.

4. Results

4.1. Members' Attitude towards the Culture and Administration of Cooperatives

Table 3 presents the frequency distribution for assessing members' attitudes towards the culture and governance of cooperatives. More than half of the participants (65%) declared that they were positively attached and closely associated with the cooperative to which they belong. This attitude is positively related to their decision not to leave the cooperative they are in even if they are presented with a better opportunity. Of particular interest is the positive attitude of most members to always defend the cooperative for which they work. This factor in combination with the compliance and obedience of the members to the basic principles of the cooperative prove their high degree of commitment to it. As for their future position in the cooperative, more than 50% of the members stated that they would not like to take positions of responsibility in it in the future. However, the fact that the members are not willing to take a position of responsibility in the cooperative does not affect their relationship with the administration of them. Specifically, 77% of the members stated that their relationship with the administrative bodies of the cooperative is impeccable, a fact that encourages them to participate in the General Assemblies, while their role in them is considered important.

Table 3. Frequency distribution table of the evaluation of the attitudes of cooperatives' members.

Questions	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Neutral		Somewhat Agree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Q1. Closely connected to the cooperative	2	2%	4	4%	10	10%	13	13%	18	18%	18	18%	34	34%
Q2. No thoughts of leaving the cooperative	6	6%	4	4%	2	2%	15	15%	16	16%	13	13%	43	43%
Q3. Continue belong in the current cooperative even better and alternative proposals	4	4%	4	4%	6	6%	18	18%	21	21%	14	14%	32	32%
Q4. Feel obliged to the cooperative	6	6%	2	2%	2	2%	14	14%	16	16%	19	19%	39	39%
Q5. Comply with the principles of the cooperatives	3	3%	3	3%	6	6%	12	12%	26	26%	18	18%	31	31%
Q6. Defend the cooperative in emergency situation	5	5%	1	1%	1	1%	9	9%	24	24%	22	22%	37	37%
Q7. Feel concerned about the future of the cooperative	2	2%	1	1%	1	1%	6	6%	24	24%	24	24%	40	40%
Q8. Feel the problems of the Cooperative as my own	8	8%	1	1%	1	1%	13	13%	19	19%	27	27%	30	30%
Q9. Willing to invest part of personal capital if this is required by the Cooperative.	11	11%	4	4%	6	6%	18	18%	17	17%	17	17%	26	26%
Q10. Willing to temporarily reduce my profit for the good of the Cooperative	14	14%	3	3%	4	4%	12	12%	23	23%	18	18%	25	25%
Q11. Interested in taking key positions in the Cooperative	24	24%	20	20%	6	6%	6	6%	12	12%	10	10%	21	21%
Q12. Interested in taking any position of responsibility. apart from the articles of association. in the Cooperative.	24	24%	19	19%	8	8%	8	8%	7	7%	9	9%	23	23%

Table 3. Cont.

Questions	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Neutral		Somewhat Agree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Q13. My communication with the administration is flawless	4	4%	3	3%	4	4%	11	11%	25	25%	19	19%	33	33%
Q14. Always participate in all General Assemblies.	7	7%	7	7%	9	9%	8	8%	15	15%	14	14%	39	39%
Q15. I influence the course of the Cooperative	8	8%	4	4%	11	11%	14	14%	24	24%	16	16%	22	22%
Q16. The more I participate in the Cooperative processes, the more I benefit financially.	6	6%	5	5%	2	2%	12	12%	20	20%	25	25%	29	29%
Q17. Strategic decisions are taken exclusively by the members of the Cooperative	2	2%	5	5%	5	5%	13	13%	21	21%	27	27%	26	26%
Q18. The governing bodies (Chairman and Board of Directors) take into account for their decisions the interests of the members of the Cooperative	5	5%	3	3%	2	2%	16	16%	19	19%	27	27%	27	27%
Q19. I trust the information given to me by the management bodies (Chairman and Board) of the Cooperative	6	6%	3	3%	1	1%	13	13%	20	20%	27	27%	29	29%
Q20. There is a sense of corruption in the Cooperative	67	67%	19	19%	5	5%	2	2%	2	2%	1	1%	3	3%
Q21. My disengagement from the Cooperative will cost me a lot of time, money and effort	9	9%	11	11%	6	6%	9	9%	7	7%	19	19%	38	38%

However, the above analysis leads to the distinction of three main categories of behavior of cooperative members, which are as follows: (i) loyalty, (ii) identification and (iii) efforts of the members towards the cooperatives. The first category that refers to the loyalty of the members towards to the cooperative they belong to is divided into three subcategories, which focus on: (i) self-estimation, (ii) alternatives options and (iii) beliefs. Regarding self-evaluation, this category relates to the first two questions. The results highlighted that 70.0% of the members evaluated themselves as closely connected with the cooperative without any thought of leaving it the near future. Regarding the second category, it concerns the alternative proposals that can be offered to the members of the cooperatives by other competitors' cooperatives. Respondents stated that such proposals could not affect their stay in the cooperative to which they have belonged all these years. This is due to the cooperative education and the beliefs of the members based on which the loyalty of the members to the cooperative has been built during their career in it. Regarding the category of identification of the members with the cooperative, it includes two subcategories: the personal feelings and the participation of the members. Almost 80% of the members participating in the survey stated that they fully agree with the principles of the cooperative and defend it whenever there is a need, thus expressing their personal feelings towards it. In addition, the active participation of the members in the solution of the problems faced by the cooperatives is very intense, as the members are worried about the future of the cooperative they belong to. In addition, the interest of the members in dealing with the issues of the cooperatives is because they feel that the problems of the cooperative are their own, proving once again the strong bond of the members towards the cooperatives. Finally, in terms of members' efforts to support the cooperative financially, members are clearly more reluctant. Only 60.0% would help the cooperative financially or would accept the reduction of salaries in a difficult economic situation.

4.2. The Impact of Cooperative Governance on Members' Cooperative Commitment

To investigate the degree of influence of the way the cooperatives are governed, an ANOVA analysis was carried out in terms of the level of cooperative commitment of the members. Table 4 indicates the strong difference between the categories related to members' loyalty to the cooperative and their self-evaluation. Essentially, the results verify that all the questions related to the way cooperatives are governed are differentiating factors for the questions that refer to the loyalty—self-evaluation of the members. Similarly, about the questions concerning the subcategories Alternatives and Belief, the χ^2 -test was performed. The test showed that the additional questions of devotion are influenced by the views on the way of governing ($p = 0.000 < 0.005$). Moreover, the way the cooperatives are governed has an impact on the personal feelings and the degree of participation of the members in it.

Table 4. Results of ANOVA analysis on the effect of governance on the four main categories of questions.

Categories	χ^2	p -Value
Dedication—Self evaluation	≥ 7635	0.000
Loyalty—Alternatives/Belief	$\geq 44,787$	0.000
Identification—Personal	≥ 3395	0.005
Emotions/Participation		
Identification—Efforts	$\geq 58,318$	0.013

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

Cooperation and the creation of cooperatives and cooperative enterprises in the agricultural sector is one of the main means by which small farmers can survive in conditions of increased competition. Farmers are always considered “small” entrepreneurs compared to their counterparts in other sectors of the economy [10]. Therefore, the need for survival

leads farmers to unite to gain bargaining power. Agricultural cooperatives were and remain the only mechanism for the acquisition of bargaining power of small and weak producers, which is the main reason for the creation of cooperatives.

The entrepreneurial activity of farmers through cooperatives is a form of activity that is not abandoned despite all the problems it presents, especially in Greece. Cooperatives, internationally, are well-organized companies that present positive results for both their members and their social environment [16]. As a rule, the strengths and weaknesses of cooperatives are “the two sides of the coin”, which have their roots in their structure. The main goal of agricultural cooperatives is considered to be to promote the interests of their members, for example, increasing of the income of members, the possibility of reducing production costs, reducing costs related to transaction costs and better flows of information on marketing issues. In general, agricultural cooperatives ensure the presence of small economic units in the market, which would have been inactivated by the competitive power of large capital-intensive enterprises [17].

For cooperatives to be able to realize and reap the benefits attributed to them, they must be able to adapt to the external environment in which they operate. However, both the global and national business and economic environment is constantly changing and requires companies to develop not only systematic operating processes but also systematic learning and adaptation processes to the changing environment in which they operate [18]. Therefore, it is necessary for cooperatives to be organized and operate effectively, according to the management theories used in other companies, always considering the specifics of the cooperative way of doing business.

The aim of the article is to investigate the extent to which the way cooperatives are governed affects the level of cooperative commitment of members. More than half of the members surveyed said they were largely affiliated with the cooperative they work for. At the same time, many members stated that throughout their career in the cooperative, they never thought of leaving it, even if they were offered a better position than another cooperative. In addition, more than 80% of the members fully agree with the principles that govern the cooperatives and express the need to defend it in practice in every difficult time. In particular, the members declare their willingness to support the cooperative financially, even if their profits after this action are significantly reduced.

The above indicate the positive attitude and behavior of the Members towards the cooperatives, a fact which significantly determines the course of the cooperatives during their years of operation. Therefore, the research presents that the members of the cooperatives of the prefecture of Larissa and their positive attitude towards the cooperative for which they work is due to the following factors: (i) the cooperative education that governs the members and (ii) their need to support the cooperative financially, even though their financial interests depend to a large extent on the cooperative. The cooperative education of the members is their belief regarding the long-term benefit they can have from their participation in it [4]. The specific belief regarding the effectiveness of the cooperative action is a key component for the cooperation. At the beginning of the activities of the cooperative, a strong belief is required, orienting the success that will be achieved through the joint effort of the members [18]. This belief is a product of the need that exists for the creation and development of the cooperative, but in any case, this belief does not mean indiscriminate acceptance of the actions of the management of the cooperative, it simply indicates good faith during the cooperative. As for the financial support of the members to the cooperative in case of need, the members maintain a positive attitude towards sacrificing a part of their profits to financially support the cooperative.

However, despite the constant support of the members to the cooperative, there is a reluctance from their side to take any position of responsibility in it. This may be due both to the lack of leadership qualities on the part of the members, but also to the lack of encouragement from the executives of the cooperative [19]. In both cases, there is a need to motivate members. As the performance of the members depends not only on their ability but also on their willingness to make the maximum effort, their motivation is

important for improving the performance of the cooperative [20]. Therefore, the motivation of the members with the help of the appropriate incentives pushes the members and the employees of the cooperative to: (i) take responsibilities, (ii) achieve the planned goals, (iii) perform their duties, (iv) make the greatest possible effort and (v) implement projects [21]. Therefore, motivation should be aimed at creating pleasure and motivating members to participate actively. Motivation is related to the recognition of efforts, the development of knowledge and experience and the prospects of personal and professional development.

Every research is subject to certain methodological limitations. With regard to this research, only members from cooperatives in Greece participated in the present study, which does not allow for the conclusions and key findings to be generalized internationally. This limitation is due to the different elements that govern each country (cultural, social, cultural, etc.), which contribute to the different governance of cooperatives. In addition, given the limited time to distribute more questionnaires, an effort was made to obtain as many answers as possible. Finally, the sample that was formed provided reliable answers that led to important findings.

In recent years, the governance of cooperatives has been an issue of particular concern to the global research community [8]. In Greece, most research regarding regional development is focused on business demographics [22]. The number of surveys related to cooperatives is quite limited, while the present survey is one of the few that have been conducted to date [4]. Regarding the findings of the present study, as well as the limitations mentioned above, future proposals for further research emerge. Initially, it is important for future scholars to investigate the correlation of the factors that favor the profitability of cooperative enterprises compared to others, as well as the way in which the psychological contribution affects the performance of the members of the cooperative [23]. At the same time, it is important to investigate the factor of innovation in cooperative enterprises and the degree of its correlation or interaction with cooperative commitment. Finally, regarding the strengthening of the cooperative culture, the Greek government in cooperation with the cooperatives must explore ways of integrating young people into them. This can be achieved through specific integration programs related to the cooperative environments [24].

6. Conclusions

The cooperative culture reflects the degree to which each member embraces the principles and values of cooperation, because they match their own personal values. The existence of a cooperative culture mobilizes the active participation of the members because the members consider that it is their obligation to interfere with the affairs of the cooperative and it contributes positively in terms of the way they are governed. The present study investigates the relationship between cooperative culture and the way of cooperative governance from the perspective of cooperative members. For this purpose, a survey was conducted in the agricultural cooperatives of the prefecture of Larissa in Greece, in which 100 members participated.

The results of the research highlighted that most of the cooperative members are closely connected with the cooperative they belong to. The statements of the cooperative members that they do not intend to leave the cooperative, even if they are offered a better position in another cooperative, are very interesting. Following this, the members stated that they fully agree with the principles of the cooperative and feel the need to defend it in any case (positive or negative). Consequently, the future of cooperatives is of practical concern to the members. However, the fact that almost 60% of the cooperative members do not want to take any position of responsibility in it is particularly impressive. Although the level of cooperative commitment remains high, the willingness to actively participate is relatively low. The main reason for this reluctant behavior on the part of the cooperative members is the lack of self-confidence or the fear of the involvement of their personal property with the debts of the cooperative to the state. At this point further effort is required, to make the involvement of the members more active.

Finally, regarding the characteristics of the way the cooperative is governed, the members seem to converge in their views on this issue. In particular, most of the participants in the research pointed out that they influence the course of the cooperative and that the greater their involvement in it, the more they benefit financially. In summary, the members seem to evaluate as very important, but also progressive the course of their cooperative. The freedom of participation and decision-making seems to dominate the way cooperatives are governed which is a very important factor, that works positively not only for the existing members of the cooperatives but in attracting young people to engage with the cooperatives, too.

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