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Mountain Cooperatives in Slovakia

Michel Lompech

- 1 Slovakia is a country of mountains and cooperatives. Even after twenty years of transformation, Slovak agriculture cannot be understood without taking its cooperatives into account. Similarly, internal disparities in this country cannot be assessed without considering its mountain environment. The Carpathian chain crosses the country from East to West: it covers 34% of the territory and approximately 40% of communes are classified as mountain areas. Even if their importance tends to decrease, cooperatives retain a considerable weight in the agricultural sector, both in number (584 in 2010) and surface (40% of the utilised agricultural land). In their vast majority, these agricultural cooperatives are the successors of the Socialist undertakings. This maintenance queries on their status, the evolutions of their property, their operation in the market economy and in the common agricultural policy. After two decades, the social and cultural factors at work in the transformation process are better known today and complement economic and spatial patterns built in the 1990s.
- 2 Examining mountain cooperatives in Slovakia incites to take up the issue of the effects of geographic context on the post-socialist transformation (Rey, 1996). Does the mountain weigh a particular effect in this process? Are there transformation paths that are strictly montane? At what level does this effect weigh in?

Cooperatives in mountains

- 3 The term mountain needs to be defined to serve as a framework for the analysis of the cooperative sector. The montane factors allow to construct a typology of the different massifs and to analyse the developments of the cooperatives.

The mountain in Slovakia

- 4 Slovakia classifies its mountains into four zones, based on criteria of altitude, steepness of slopes and length of winter¹. The so-called mountain communes are arranged concentrically around the High and Low Tatras and the Fatras towards the three

directions West/South and East (figures 1 and 2). In this central European country, the mountain environment combines the effects of altitude and those of the continental character of the territory. The altitude determines the temperatures and the layers of vegetation. The High Tatras (2,200 m) are too steep to possess real mountain summer pastures while many *pásienky* occupy the peaks of the Low Tatras. Indeed, several cooperatives of the okres of Brezno specialise in sheep pastoralism.

- 5 The forest cover of this mountain area is uneven. The North West massifs and some central islets are populated and well-farmed; the foothills basin of the Tatras Piedmont forms the Liptov and the Spiš historical regions. In contrast, the middle mountain of the Beskydy range and of the Ore Mountains offers up to 45% of forest cover, or even more. Here, the cadastral agrarian allotments are narrow and subject to a centuries-old abandonment of agricultural land. Unsurprisingly, agricultural cooperatives in the area are few. It should be noted that the founding law of cooperatives in 1949 excluded logging from the activity of cooperatives. Thus, both mountain and forest villages do not generally have such facilities; their lands are exploited by external companies, and small-scale farmers, or more often left abandoned. Such is the case in the Beskydy range or to the East of the Ore Mountains (okres of Gelnica, Spišská Nová Ves).
- 6 The geographical framework is different depending on the massifs. The mountain areas are divided into three regional subsets. The first groups together the Western massifs (Považie, Kysuce, and Orava) and goes up along the highway from the North to Liptovský Mikuláš: they benefit from the industrial and urban dynamism of the Váh valley which extends in the Liptov and Turiec tourism facilities. In the eastern regions (Spiš, the north of Turiec), the regional space is marked by problems of under-development in respect of infrastructure and the phenomena of economic depression. Central Slovakia is animated by the dynamic urban pole around the Banská Bystrica-Zvolen twin towns, while the eastern valleys (Porhonie, Gemer and Malohont) combine the effects of the crises of the single-industry economy and of the agricultural transformation.

Figure 1. Mountains in Slovakia

Authors : Michel Lompech and Julien Chadeyron, Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2015.

Figure 2 . Cooperatives in Obce (municipality) in slovakian mountains in 2014

Authors : Michel Lompech and Julien Chadeyron, Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2014.

Cooperatives in numbers

- 7 Establishing a precise number of cooperatives in Slovakia is a difficult task. The 2010 agricultural census (*Census fariem*) provides a figure of 584 cooperatives at national level, which exploit 740,080 ha, or 40% of the Slovak UAA (Utilised Agricultural Area). These data are available at the level of the regions (*kraj*): the two 'mountain' regions of Žilina and Banská Bystrica count 86 cooperatives each, which exploit 60% of the UAA. Researchers of the Institute of Agricultural Economics hold these data against those of the Agricultural Payments Agency and those of the Trade Register (Škriniarová, 2012). They observe a fluctuation explained by the existence of cooperatives that are no longer active while remaining registered, as they receive subsidies for land they lease to corporate companies or because they have not liquidated all their assets.
- 8 The regional framework is not enough to appreciate the importance of mountain cooperatives and there is no *Census fariem* counting available at the lower level of the okres, let alone at the level of the mountain communes. We chose to exploit the *Agro-register* database of a satellite agency of the Ministry of Agriculture², extracting from it any data on cooperatives of mountain communes. The use of this register is then held against a series of cross-checks on communes' sites and with various players of the agricultural sector, in order to eliminate non-active cooperatives or corporate companies. This map was finally compared to the map drawn for the *Atlas Slovenska* by geographer Peter Spišiak, published in 1999³ and which locates existing cooperatives to this date by point drawings, thus measuring the current situation and its evolution over some fifteen years.
- 9 The map (figure 3) reveals the large number of communes (810) devoid of a cooperative. They may be either forest communes or communes consisting of uncultivated areas, as suggested by the wide mesh of the High Tatras. However, most cooperatives are involved in the cadastral agrarian allotments of several communes; the phenomenon thus indicates the relatively strong concentration of cooperative companies in the mountain area. So, 261 mountain communes have a cooperative. Let us note the general case and the exception: cooperatives are present in the entire

mountain area and constitute therefore an inescapable reality of these spaces; the Eastern okres that have no cooperative (Hummené, Medzilaborce and Snina) escape this observation. This is one of the rare clear regional configurations: all eastern Slovakia okres saw their numbers of cooperatives disappear or significantly reduce. This is an indicator of the collapse of companies established by the economy administered in these eastern regions. It is in line with the issue of regional under-development of this part of the country, and is a clear sign of the helplessness of local companies facing the transformation of agriculture. The next factor relates to the maintenance or the decrease in number of cooperatives in most mountain okres. This number is stable in 13 okres, and 134 entities are maintained. It decreases in 32 okres: at the local structure level, for the 87 communes concerned, this usually means the disappearance of the only village cooperative, even though in some cases the map of 1999 reveals two establishments on a same commune. Finally, the number of cooperatives increases in 40 localities: as entirely new creations are very rare, these are thus divisions of a first entity. In total, this distribution reproduces the observable regional inequalities in Slovakia, as well as the pivots of the agricultural economy at the national level: numerous cooperatives (although decreasing) and well-distributed.

Figure 3. Changes in mountain cooperatives in Slovakia (1999 to 2014)

Authors : Michel Lompech, Daniel Ricard and Julien Chadeyron, Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2014.

Collectivized and standardised mountain

- 10 The economic development during the Socialist period marked the Slovak mountain according to a temporality different from that of lowland and plain areas. The continued development of the cooperative sector has been its privileged mode of action.

A climb in stages towards the collectivized mountain

- 11 The situation of the cooperative sector of 1989 is the culmination of a four-decade process, with failures, mergers and late creations. The propagation of cooperatives took place in several waves which differently affected the mountain areas. Post-war land

reforms (1946-1948) only concern them marginally, as large holdings were little represented: the most notable cases are the possessions of the canonical chapter of Spišská Kapitula, or the land of the German villages in the Spiš. After the Prague coup in 1948, the Communist authorities adopted a first legislation establishing the *Jednote Roľnícke Družstvo*, JRD (United Farmers' Cooperative) in 1949. This is when the great stage of the 1950s begins. It disrupts the local companies through *agit-prop* campaigns, starting the debate on social inequality in the villages, promoting the fight against the "kulaks", raising the issues of rural under-employment, of the status of peasant women, of labour emigration, of the role of the youth, and of the mechanisation of farm work, all in view to pave the way for the socialisation of the means of production. Thus, the history of collectivization interlocks the complexity of local histories and agrarian tensions in the mountains, the confessional and ethnic differences... This second wave of collectivization concerns the country as a whole, especially in the main plains and valleys of the great massifs. The steeper areas are not considered a priority, due to their low agronomic value and the small size of their communities.

- 12 Figure 4 shows this spatio-temporal propagation of collectivization in the Tatras (Spišiak, 1993). The first cooperatives appear as early as 1949 in German villages where landless peasants had settled. In 1953, these small cooperatives devoid of means and animated by members without experience are grouped into State farms. The second stage lasted from 1955 to 1961 and concerned the spaces adjacent to the first cooperatives. The third stage, from 1977 to 1988, saw the collectivization of the peripheral valleys. The plan is to eventually absorb the last remaining communes. Accordingly so, the farmers of Rehoľa joined a cooperative in 1988!

Figure 4. Collectivization in the High Tatras

Authors : Michel Lompech and Julien Chadeyron, Université Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2014.

- 13 With regard to the duration of the Socialist period, it is the third stage of collectivization, 1972-1975, that appears specifically montane, private farms having incidentally totally disappeared in some great plains. The regional administration never renounced to integrate all of the communes into the cooperative system. The ideological stiffening of Czechoslovak "normalisation" corresponded to a tenacious pressure towards a complete socialisation. The non-collectivized communes are located in marginal mountain areas, on very steep slopes. It still needs to be emphasized that they were generally integrated into functional spaces that made peasant economy negligible. So, in the centre of Slovakia, the partly non-collectivized communes of Detva and Hriňová were included in the pool of jobs of an armaments factory, in which the way of life of peasant-workers (*kovoroľník*) developed. In the Tatras, traditional landscapes can be observed near tourist resorts, around the village of Ždiar. The regional development schemes planned the decline of the remotest border communes, via a policy of hierarchical concentration of settlement, particularly in the North East of the country (okres of Snina, Svidník, Stara Ľubovňa or Stropkov); as far as the authorities were concerned, the abandonment of maintenance of plots by the failing private operators legitimised the collectivization. Incidentally, the last land disputes between farmers and cooperatives do not end before the fall of the Communist regime. It is understandable that the local memory of agrarian tensions, just as the social mobilisation that the creation of cooperatives represented, is still vivid. The objective pursued by the regime, namely the eventual disappearance of private agricultural ownership through the generalisation of the cooperative model, was almost reached in 1989: only 300 private farmers remained who exploited 2.6% of the UAA.
- 14 This chronology of cooperatives provides an element of understanding. It must be supplemented by their insertion in agro-food sectors in the 1970s. The period tends then towards the industrialisation of agriculture, resulting in the transformation of the agrarian structure and the setting up of large agricultural complexes. Cooperatives are then included in an "administered territorial organisation" (Zrinscak, 1997). Between 1971 and 1978, in order to achieve this concentration of companies, about 800 cooperatives are merged across the whole of Slovakia to create 400 new entities. At the level of this administrative mesh, cooperatives benefit from investments, usually in livestock farming, as it was the main objective of this productive mutation. Large buildings abandoned for twenty years and which were intended for much larger companies are frequently observed in mountain farms. At the level of these large structures, the cooperative economy wove exchanges between cooperatives over long distances, particularly for heifers breeding, with transfer of herds from dairy to grassland areas, and fodder production. This mass production was planned by the regional administration that also organised the relationships between the cooperatives and the processing companies. These mergers were designed in conjunction with the organisation into a hierarchy of centres contributing to the grouping of settlements. Now, many mountain villages only have technical annexes of cooperatives located in town centres, with production facilities deprived of a real autonomy of production.
- 15 In this process, the JRD (acronym defined above) were not masters of their own choices, but heavily constraint by the regional administration. If the management could be of local origin, technical specialisations were decided by agronomists appointed by the administration. It was the administration that made decisions to merge institutions, bypassing the vote of the General Assembly of the cooperatives concerned. However,

the capacities for action of the latter are not to be underestimated. In 1978, the Party's Central Committee stopped the process due to numerous protests against these authoritarian mergers, proof of some degree of autonomy. Furthermore, some cooperatives also sought to emerge somewhat from the shackles of the agro-complex, by creating channels of direct sales, small dairies, livestock development workshops, or by building tourist accommodation infrastructure. Thereby, the most important cooperatives of Central Slovakia, such as Zvolenská Slatina, Sebechleby or Dobrá Niva, have dairies and slaughterhouses. This equipment will constitute an essential basis during the transition phase to face the collapse of prices and the disruption of markets, thus allowing the revival of business activity.

The evolution of rural opinion on cooperatives

- 16 So in the 1970s and 1980s, the Slovak mountain experienced the essential phase of its modernisation. For the cooperative sector, the 1980s were the years of productive success, with a national agricultural production multiplied by three. Some mountain cooperatives showed good results and served as showcases of Socialist agriculture, such as the best farms of the Danubian Plain: like the cooperative of Prybilina on the foothills of the Tatras Mountains, for instance. Created in the 1950s, this peasant cooperative survived the next decade with difficulty. In the early 1970s, the agricultural administration turns it into a potato production centre for the entire Liptov while setting up there a workshop of industrial assembly. The company thrives, benefits from new equipment and builds tenements for its members. In rural areas, cooperatives were clearly the place for the mass culture promoted by the regime. Understanding their maintenance involves comprehending the long time needed for cultural change.
- 17 Although cooperatives were not created on a voluntary basis, but by political as well as physical pressure on people in the 1950s, they were gradually accepted as an essential component of rural life. Their prosperity significantly influenced the equipment and the level of the villages. These companies insert the local economy in a network of exchanges, contribute to getting out of peasant subsistence farming, and reduce seasonal emigration. The cooperative regime allows rural people to benefit from the advantages of wage earning, of social security, and of retirement pensions. It also expands the cooperative economy to the building, distribution and exchange sectors. The success of the third wave of collectivization cannot be understood without taking into account the progress this model offers. Once collective exploitation imposed on local society, the State agrarian protectionism and the social benefits, advantageous to farmers and their family, lead to consider as natural a certain standard of life unconnected with the productivity of individual work.

The effects of the mountain context and the paths of transformation of cooperatives

- 18 The economic transition saw a movement of fragmentation of large cooperatives, then a sharp decline in the number of agricultural structures, the closure of farms, and the liquidation of State farms. It is appropriate to look for the effects of the mountain context in the transformation process of cooperatives.

Legislation, laws to transform cooperatives

- 19 It is the Transformation Act of 1991 that brings about the transformation of cooperatives. If it chooses to respect the right of cooperatives members, the Act creates new rights for cooperatives property owners, so as to establish a new social order (Maurel, 1994). This liberal procedure, aimed at reintroducing the notion of property amongst economic players, actually reduced the co-operators' right. This scenario ran into the obstacle of the fragmentation of land ownership in Slovakia as a whole, even stronger in these ancient peasant mountains. There, the atomisation of the cooperative ownership is accentuated because of the importance of the original micro-fondium on some ranges, particularly in the Orava. In many mountain communes, the first General Assembly of transformation had to take place on the village stadium to accommodate all the right-holders. It is easy to understand that such an Assembly was unmanageable. The mountain agrarian societies were relatively egalitarian: no right-holder benefited from a significant portion of the property, in contrast to the plains which were more organised into a social hierarchy. The functioning of cooperatives was blocked without public opinion finding any kind of interest. The return procedure did not spark the restoration of family farming, especially in the mountains where such cases were rare, although not completely absent, whereas more frequent in the Danubian plain. The objective of this economic policy was to restore the links to agricultural capital and land ownership, but this only happened in a formal way, totally unrelated to their economic purpose. Therefore, the land ownership structure plays a major part in the mountain context. This effect of agrarian memory (Rey, 1996, p. 216) stopped the will of the legislator.
- 20 This law, passed in a spirit of revenge, is modified by the Slovak Parliament in 1995. The new legislation requires cooperatives to convert the shares held by non-member right-holders in "securities of cooperatives membership shares" *družstevné podielnícké listy* (DPLs)⁴. Such securities guarantee the right of each holder to participate in the profits of the company, to exchange them or claim their repurchase by the cooperative, and to participate in the General Assembly. During the latter, the vote no longer matches the cooperative principle of "one member one vote", but corresponds to the number of shares held by each member. This provision drastically alters the corporate governance by giving more power to the cooperative steering body. A large number of cooperatives were reluctant to enforce the law. In 2005, a third Act forced them to comply under threat of liquidation, which allowed the completion of the registration procedure. The transformation of cooperatives therefore leads to this peculiar situation in which individuals are holders of property rights of cooperatives of which they are not members. There are, on one hand, holders who are not members of the cooperative and who, however, hold a share of property and who cannot intervene in the management of the cooperative and, on the other hand, members of the cooperative who are not the exclusive owners of their cooperative. Here lies the ambiguity of the status of agricultural cooperative in Slovakia.
- 21 These securities give right to the payment of dividends, which many companies cannot pay. Through tax provisions of a fourth law passed in 2013, the State is getting prepared to recover these securities. Is this a way for the State to intervene in the

transformation process by consolidating the structures or by paying off the initial mortgage created by the Act of 1991?

- 22 So, restructuring of capital are under way within cooperatives and none of them communicate on the value of their DPLs, on transactions, and on the identity of the buyers. There are two main solutions: either the cooperative itself repurchases the securities, or members buy shares, and executives are most often those who benefit from the concentration of capital. As they cannot buy all the shares and as a relative local consensus is more acceptable by all parties, the cooperative form is maintained. The annual general meeting resembles a statutory meeting of a local association with balance sheets and activity reports, and the DPLs portfolio looks like savings left by grandparents...
- 23 Most Slovak companies had difficulties going through the years of transition, the end of the aid schemes, the chaotic developments of markets, and the restructuring of network channels. The most distressed did not pay dividends to their shareholders, or did not even pay the property owners. Over the past ten years, the economic growth and the integration into the CAP have reversed this situation.

The effect of mountain context on the enforcement of transformation laws

- 24 The successive transformations of a same company reflect the uncertainties regarding the cooperative form. This shows in the names of new entities: simple agricultural cooperative (*poľnohospodarské družstvo*) or shareholder cooperative (*Podielnícké družstvo*), farmers' cooperative (*Roľnícké družstvo*) or even "cooperative of the village of N. located in the village of N.", this precision meaning to affirm its anchoring in the commune, sometimes complemented by the name of a massif, of the natural or historical region, such as Dumbier, Gemer, Hont, Spiš, Orava, and Beskydy... The organisation in agro-complexes was usually fragmented, each village wishing to manage the redistribution of property locally. However, the map shows that cooperatives are relatively concentrated in the mountains. The decline of certain mountain communes did not allow the autonomisation of the production.
- 25 Some of these cooperatives managed to preserve their structure, to avoid the sale of the equipment, degradation, theft, and the abandonment of the facilities. Thus in the two dairy cooperatives presented below, Kluknava in the Ore mountains and Veľká Franková in Zamugurie, executives managed to use the inter-knowledge and solidarity within their village to prevent the breakup of the company at the General Assembly. The recent temporality of these companies paradoxically explains their maintenance: the very same members created the cooperative and agreed to preserve it ten years later.
- 26 Partly neglected by the administrative guidelines, the natural mountain conditions are again taken into account in the market economy and lead to rationalisations of productions. It is "the effect of the ambient geographical environment" (Rey, 1996) that intervenes directly in the mountain context. The cooperatives involved many activities: oversized farming, potato packing stations, imposed crop rotations. The market economy calls for specialisation. Farms simplify their technical guidance, and reduce their control over the UAA. Industrial pigsties and chicken coops are gradually closed. Sheep farming emerged as the favoured speculation for the survival of farms. This

"constitution of basin production effect", which did not appear at the beginning of the economic transition of the 1990s (Rey, 1996) is very clear in 2014. The examples developed below show that the restructuring of the network channels is not complete yet. There is a peculiar spatial inversion between the major zones of sheep or bovine breeding in mountain areas: the massifs traditionally dedicated to sheep breeding in the first half of the 19th century, such as the Orava, were specialised in bovine breeding/milk production by the administered economy, mainly to produce large quantities and to create jobs, when others, as in the High Tatras, were specialised in sheep breeding, while they were outside the traditional production zone of *bryndza* (Ricard, 2009). This is a direct legacy of the planning.

- 27 The transformation also gives rise to a sharp decline in waged employment on the farm by the cut of positions filled by retirees, of seasonal jobs occupied by individuals of the Roma minorities, the non-replacement of retiring employees, and the closure of so-called "auxiliary production" workshops, where assembly operations were carried out for industrial firms. Such restructuring reduces the role of the cooperative in the local economy.

Portraits of cooperatives in mountain areas

- 28 Mountain cooperatives show very varied patterns and these differences between companies are not yet readable at the regional level. Company portraits allow measuring the role exercised by their management, their integration into the local society and the production guidance (Swain, 2000). They draw a typology of mountain cooperatives.
- 29 Here is the example of the *Agrodružstvo Revuca*. It was founded in 2001 on the base of an establishment that directly succeeded the JRD, filed in bankruptcy in 1999. The cooperative exploits the largest part of the Muráň plateau, on 1,191 ha and five communes. In this region of Central Slovakia, rural abandonment is secular. On grass soils, the cooperative breeds meat cattle (calves and heifers), and a breeding flock of the *valašská* breed. The cooperative still has the monopoly for local agriculture next to six small self-employed farmers (15 to 20 ha each). It received European aid to renovate its buildings, and to purchase equipment. It provides the profile of a cooperative of managers that preserves the local consensus by taking on employees and has established itself as a player in land-use planning with the local communities and the administration, in a region marked by rural exodus, landscape abandonment and economic depression.
- 30 The *EKO-Družstvo Kalinka* cooperative enhances the southern slopes of the Poľana massif in the centre of the country. It was founded in 1997, on the estate of a first transformation failure of the JRD. It has 21 members and employs 14 people. It exploits 958 ha leased to private owners and the Slovak Land Fund. Cereal yields, in organic production mode, are low (26 quintals/ha for wheat, 27 quintals/ha for oats). The cooperative breeds fallow deer and mountain sheep as well as a herd of ewes for meat (approximately 1,000 heads). It received European aid to transform a former pigsty into a sheepfold and to fence a large park (130 ha) for his game. It has reoriented its activity towards a hunting estate. This is an example of a village cooperative (360 inhabitants) which adapts its structure and its project to the local resource. Devoid of means and

without real weight against the regional players in the dairy sector, its leaders build an alternative project.

- 31 The following three cases group together cooperatives relatively large by the number of their members, their role in the local society and close to the cooperative structure by their way of maintenance.
- 32 Here is the example of the *Agro-družstvo Krivá na Orave*. Established in 1950, the JRD actually only started in 1960. 300 dairy cows were bred at the time. The new company only has 150 left, but its milk production is 100,000 l. superior to that of the 1960s. As a result of bad business, the successor cooperative is placed in liquidation and five members file a new recovery project. They are joined by 142 members and 180 shareholders. The company employs 19 people, four of whom are in charge of the management (24 in the former JRD!). Milking installations and the animal housing are modernised, and the milk yield significantly improved (6,700 l/cow). To deal with the closure of the Tvrdošín dairy, the cooperative built a cheese factory which produces the traditional assortment (*hrudkový syr, parenice, oštiepok, korbačky*). The cooperative got rid of a non-profitable poultry breeding activity, and of the village bakery. It therefore focuses on the production of milk with two herds, cows and ewes (750 heads, cross-bred Valašská/Lacaune). The cooperative exploits 524 ha, of which 125 of ploughing (barley and potatoes). This cooperative has overcome its processing difficulties, at the cost of an overhaul. It ensures its future by improving its productivity, balancing its accounts and through the autonomy guaranteed by the transformation of the production. It benefits from an involved managerial leadership which relies on a wide social base, in a demographically dynamic mountain, but experiencing a high unemployment rate. This context of regional under-employment and a first transformation failure ensure the commitment of members to a rigorous management.
- 33 In the heart of the karst of the Gemer and the Spiš, the Kluknava cooperative exploits the soils of the main valley on 25 km: 2,390 ha on 9 villages, with altitudes from 360 m to 1,500 m. Most of the surface is in permanent pasture (750 ha), with 1,000 ha of mountain pastures. The cooperative has three herds: 200 dairy cows, 100 beef cattle and 3,000 ewes. It built its own cheese factory in Jaklovce that produces 500 t. of bryndza/year. The cooperative employs 76 people, 12 of whom are in charge of the management. Thanks to European aid, it renovated its equipment, transformed its buildings, and bought tractors. Founded in 1958, it has been headed by the same executive manager since 1981. In 1988, it employed 488 people: most worked in assembly workshops (container and shoe manufacturing, sawmill). Only 180 members remain, 27 of whom are employed. The company was one of the first to issue DPLs. To become a member of the cooperative, an entrance fee of €1,600 has to be paid, as did two vets hired recently. This example showcases a type of company that perpetuates the cooperative structure and spirit in continuity. It strengthens its activities in the agricultural sector and reinforces its specialisation by the transformation of the production. The European agricultural policy stabilises its operation. In a regional area undergoing de-industrialisation and social marginalisation, the cooperative model proves its legitimacy, at the price of a clear decline.
- 34 It is also the case of the *Podielnické družstvo Goral* in the village of Veľká Franková. Located in part of the border area with Poland, this village cooperative is one of the last created in 1978. In 1992, the company was rebuilt by the same management team. It exploits 700 ha, mainly as mountain pastures. It employs 37 people. The production

focuses on sheep farming (2,000 heads). As early as 1992, the cooperative starts a cheese dairy to produce bryndza, which ensures its relative independence. It has 84 members, most of whom are retired and several employees do not have the status of members. The same executive manager has been in place since 1991. Employees are over 45-year old in average. The company offers the example of a 'generational' cooperative that manages to hold its own thanks to the cohesion of its restricted social group (in a village of 350 inhabitants) and a specialisation tailored to the market.

Conclusion

- 35 Mountain cooperatives in Slovakia have indeed followed a specific path of transformation which can be explained by effects due to the mountain context. These ancient peasant mountains inherited a pulverised structure of land ownership that the cooperative form radically overcame. The rural decline, multiplying the unidentified plots of land and reducing the size of the communities, is another effect of montane agrarian memory. The maintenance of cooperatives productivity is explained both by their agricultural specialisation within production basins in the making and their adaptation to the conditions of the natural environment. The meaning of the cooperative status is more ambiguous in the reality of their operation. It refers to the diversity of rural societies and their modalities of adaptation to modernisation. In general, the cohesion of the local society made possible to preserve the company, by carrying decisive choices over to the level of local consensus. In a country marked by folklore, the regional scale of traditional cultural areas constitutes the best grid for the analysis of the restructuring of cooperatives.

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NOTES

1. Criteria for the definition of mountain in Slovakia: average altitude ≥ 700 m, the average altitude ≥ 700 m and under 600 m. Steepness of slopes $\geq 20\%$ (11.8°) on over 50% of the commune surface area. Average altitude ≥ 500 m and < 600 m by combining the side of the slopes (8.31°) $\geq$ on 15% of the commune's surface area.
  2. www.radela.sk/agroregister.
  3. p. 169 of *Atlas Slovenska*.
  4. These DPLs are fiduciary securities registered with the Paper Share Centre (*Stredisko cenných papierov*).
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ABSTRACTS

One third of Slovakia is covered by mountain range where cooperatives are the main agricultural actors. These collective farms were created within the frame of the former administered economy and have survived its break up. The specific temporality of the collectivization in mountain and the structure of local communities are important factors in the stages of change. The paper aims at estimating the effects of the mountain context in the restructuring of the cooperatives and gives a typology of the current forms of cooperatives in mountain areas.

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