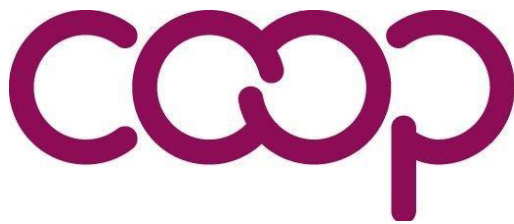


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ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΕΥΝΕΤΑΙΡΙΑΤΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ

& ΜΕΛΕΤΩΝ (ΙΣΕΜ)

Title of abstract: Stronger together, but how? Lessons from the Walloon dairy history on the strategic relevance of cooperative models

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Abstract : (max. 300 words)

Agri-food cooperatives evolved over the last decades towards an increasing diversity of cooperative models, understood as modes of horizontal and vertical coordination of the value chain. This historical investigation informs theory on the strategic relevance of cooperative models for prospective pathways of value chain development. The paper draws on the variety of coordination models encountered in the trajectories of consolidation of the Walloon dairy cooperatives over the last sixty years. A SWOT analysis based on historical accounts outlines the strengths and weaknesses of cooperative models on two dimensions underpinning their long-term strategic success: their strategic relevance in a given market and institutional context; their impact on the farmers' commitment. Going beyond the epistemological limits of these historical accounts, we discuss the effect of market, regulatory and institutional frameworks on the cost-efficiency and strategic efficiency of cooperative models in the agri-food sector and beyond. We also discuss how upscaling in consolidation processes acts as magnifying glass on the strategic failures of cooperative models in a given context. Drawing from these insights, the paper proposes, based on Ostrom's IAD framework, a theory-informing illustration of the complex combination of factors defining a cooperative model's outcomes in cost-efficiency and strategic efficiency. This theoretical illustration may inform practices, in particular choice of cooperative models in prospective pathways of sustainable development. It may also define avenues of collective mobilization and research on the institutional and regulatory evolutions needed to support polycentric value chains. The paper calls for longitudinal and historically informed studies on cooperative models, to clarify which internal and external factors influence the strategic relevance of cooperative models as enablers of prospective pathways of sustainable value chain development.

Keywords: value chain coordination; hybrids; strategic relevance; commitment; polycentricity.