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Impact Assessment of the Information Transfer between Great Britain and Romania

Abstract

The European Union has a very rich experience in the field of research, innovation and knowledge transfer. In order to take advantage of this experience, the economic policies in this field should be able to efficiently use the national experience. This objective can be also reached by the best use of the great agricultural potential and by promoting new models and equations, where the cooperative has to be identified as an active actor of the knowledge transfer vector.

Our article started from the need to design a picture of theoretical and practical accumulations, directly connected to a reflection in the economic field, which can provide a better and rich informative, coherent and explanatory material, regarding the stage of the knowledge transfer and European project management.

It was very important for us to identify those effects that contribute to the development process, both for the cooperative movement and especially for the rural environment, as a whole.

Keywords: cooperatives, agriculture potential, rural development, knowledge transfer, project management

JEL Classification: Q10, Q16

The European Union has a long tradition in the field of research, innovation and knowledge transfer, resulting in an active and progressive involvement in the management of the scientific and technological excellence.

From the institutional point of view, the European research activity is carried out by specialized institutes, academic institutions and entrepreneurs that cooperate under their own specialized cooperation networks. It is obvious that the research networks provide a better support, not only for cooperation, but also for the convergence of research and innovation policies, as well as for extensions at national and European level. In addition, the research networks contribute to the acceleration of the knowledge development process in the following fields: research policies, education and innovation, so that the acquired knowledge should contribute to the potentiation and dynamisation of economy and society, on a sustainable basis, with special reference to environment protection.

The target for Europe is to gain and consolidate the management in key areas of research. This objective is generous, not only for the Europeans, but for the whole mankind, in the globalization

process; this because, through research, we can bridge up the gaps between different countries and regions and we can accelerate the development rate, mainly in the less developed countries.

That is why, research and technological development represent the areas with the most alert movements in the globalization process, due to the exchange of researchers, information and results, as all these can now move easier and freely from one country to another.

In this general context, agriculture represents one of the priority fields in the European research, whose final goals are identified with those of the Common Agricultural Policy. The changes produced in CAP philosophy have naturally induced changes in the research segment as well, which currently makes the rural area a priority field of research, with agriculture holding a central position. The size and complexity of rural Europe, as well as the fast changes produced in this field, have induced deep changes in the local culture and economy. The specific research has demonstrated the huge diversity of rural development approaches. The studies that have been carried out highlight these efforts, made both by researchers and farmers, for the potentiation of resources and for more efficient results.

Romania's joining the EU has induced and will include significant changes not only in the practical activities of CAP implementation, but also in the field of research and extension. The European model has obviously demonstrated its performance, its perennial character and efficiency. It is close to us, especially after January 1, 2007. The following steps are to understand it, promote and adopt it, as fast as possible, as the gaps between Romania and the EU are huge. The doctrinaire liberalism, characteristic for all the European economic policies, will also have a word to say in research, as it will also have to address the narrow segments, which will have a driving role in the process of economic and social growth as a whole. At present the research networks prove their opportunity, providing a fruitful collaboration and cooperation framework between the North and the South, the East and the West, between village and town, that is between research and production, through the transfer of knowledge.

We shall next present a research and extension network pattern, created together with partners from Great Britain and Romania, in the field of rural cooperation. For this network development, two stages were developed as information transfer support:

The first stage consisted of the development of a study program funded by the World Bank and the Ministry of Agriculture from Romania, named "Rural Extension and Diversification Consortium".

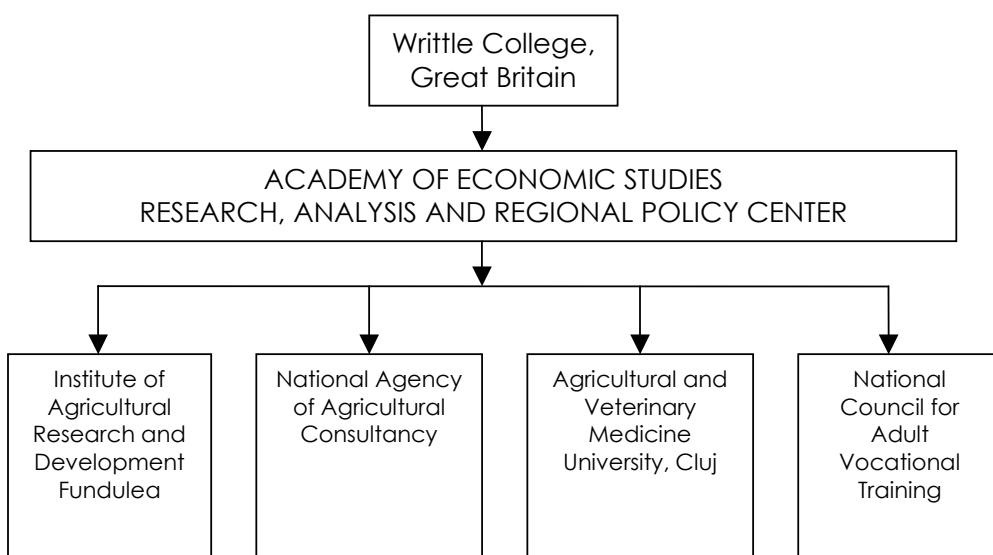
The second stage was materialized into the institutionalization of the Consortium based on the juridical formula of a farmers' and processors' association in Călărași county.

The first stage was developed under the above-mentioned project, which generally respected the rules imposed by the funding

body and presupposed the transfer of information between the partners, as follows:

- The general objective of the project was represented by getting aware of the advantages implied by the cooperation actions on the agricultural market; the specific objectives, as expression of the modalities in which the general objective was manifested, as well as a support to reaching this general objective, were the following: research, education, communication and socialization, consortium institutionalization, the dissemination and promotion of the research results.
- The project partnership is briefly presented in the next figure:

Figure 1. The partners in the Rural Extension and Diversification Consortium project



The graph above presents the information flows within the network, highlighting the leader position of Writtle College, which was the main source in information transmission. We mention that all the partners held equal positions in the project, except for the Academy of Economic Studies (AES) that had a leading role through the Research, Analysis and Regional Policy Center.

- The transfer of knowledge (Figure 2), of information respectively, was directed from Great Britain, a country with tradition and best results in rural renaissance, towards Romania, a country that has quite a modest position in this field in the hierarchy of the European States.

Writtle College, a public higher education institution, with over 100 years experience in university education as well as in agricultural and rural research and extension, considered it opportune in the process of information transfer to promote to the Romanian partners, universities and central administration institutions, the idea of strengthening a structure of cooperative type for the Romanian

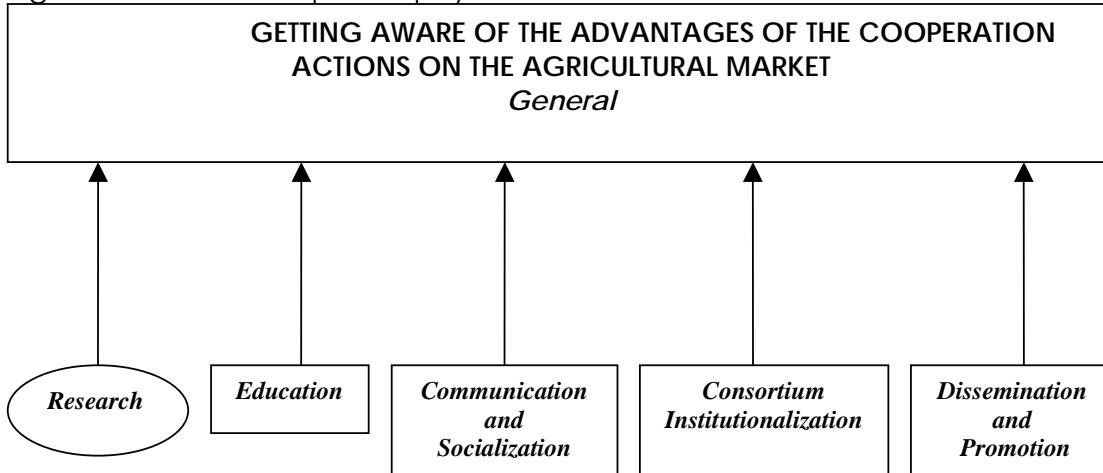
farmers, having in view the common management of the agricultural input and output markets.

The information transfer under partnership with Writtle College targeted three knowledge fields: the consortium philosophy, the integrated crop management and the entrepreneurial spirit.

The information transmission vectors were personalized for each knowledge field by the following formula:

- The consortium philosophy through conferences, round tables and workshops, from Writtle College to the implementation team;
- The crop management through training sessions with specialists in the academic and agricultural research field addressed to the farmers selected for project development;
- The entrepreneurial spirit through work visits in locations from Romania and Great Britain, addressed to the farmers.

Figure 2. Consortium philosophy



The Consortium philosophy (Figure 2) consisted of getting aware of the cooperation advantages on the Romanian agricultural markets. The motivational support of this approach was that the Common Agricultural Policy promotes the cooperative structures in the equation of performance growth in agriculture, focusing on the activity of agricultural market management. The importance of the cooperative type structures is mainly determined by their position in the society, in economy respectively, as an intermediate chain between the civil society, which targets the respect of the rights and liberties of human being, and the economic society, whose final goal is profit maximization. In this position, any society of cooperative type and implicitly the Rural Extension and Diversification Consortium targets the maximization of the involved farmers' incomes, the increase of the input supply level and the best commercial use of production and production diversification, on the basis of the knowledge transfer.

Crop management was materialized into training sessions organized for the selected farmers so that they could get a theoretical training in the new and important issues regarding Romanian agriculture, as Romania had to get integrated into the EU structures.

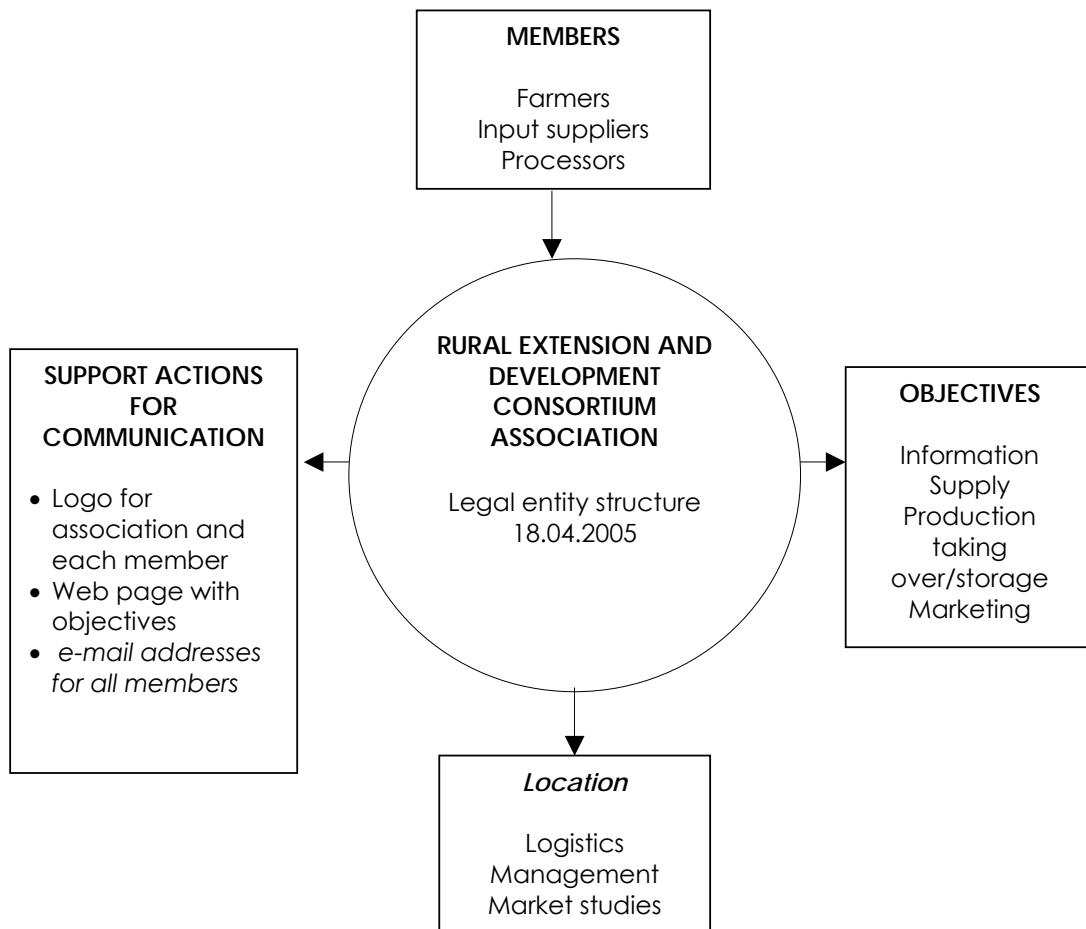
The training sessions were organized within the workshops organized by the Academy of Economic Studies through the Research, Analysis and Regional Policy Center, as project coordinator. The 19 workshops took place in three months (April, May, June 2004), in two locations, Calarași and Borcea. The participants to the workshops were the farmers selected from the centers from Borcea, Vâlcelele and Ilieana.

The training curriculum focused on five general issues: agricultural policies, management, marketing, organic farming and technologies.

Such an inter-disciplinary approach offered a large field of representativity on the issues of major interest, manifested in Romania's agriculture, with direct effects in production performance.

The entrepreneurial spirit was approached from the perspective of the managerial skills development and of their performance increase, as it was considered that the farmers involved in the project proved that they had native skills in managing their own business, through their production results and efficiency. The potentiation of the entrepreneurial spirit had as finality both the establishment and the operation of the consortium.

Figure 3. Entrepreneurial spirit



As subordinated to these two premises, we also present in graph 3 the operation modality of the entrepreneurial spirit, the finality of which was the consortium establishment, as support for the cooperation, agricultural extension and diversification network operation. In order to reach this desideratum, it was considered as opportune the organization of working visits to farms, processors and cooperatives in Romania and Great Britain, with good and very good results.

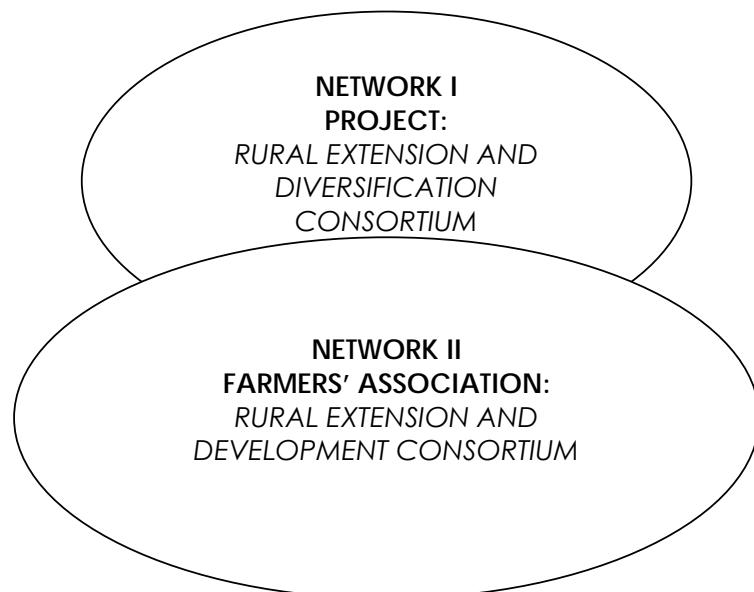
The working visits have largely contributed to the understanding of the following: implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy at farm level; getting familiar with new production, storage and marketing technologies and systems; acquiring knowledge and experience in the field of extension, diversification, cooperation and association; access to information on the EU regulations with regard to production quality; increase in the socialization level of farmers from the target group; getting aware of the cooperation importance and necessity in a modern and performant farming system.

All these objectives in the field of knowledge implied: information, exchange of experience, practical applications, relationships and last but not least, the development of the cooperative spirit, by the power of example.

In conclusion it was proved that the power of example efficiently operated in farmers in the direction of improving their entrepreneurial skills.

The second stage, as it has been previously specified, was materialized into the institutionalization of the farmers' association, named Rural Extension and Development Consortium, which, from the scientific point of view, provided the operation framework in the market relations between the farmers and processors involved. Under this background, this was the second cooperation network, which derived from the first one (Figure 4), and took over and used the information from the research program funded by the World Bank.

Figure 4. The results of the information transfer

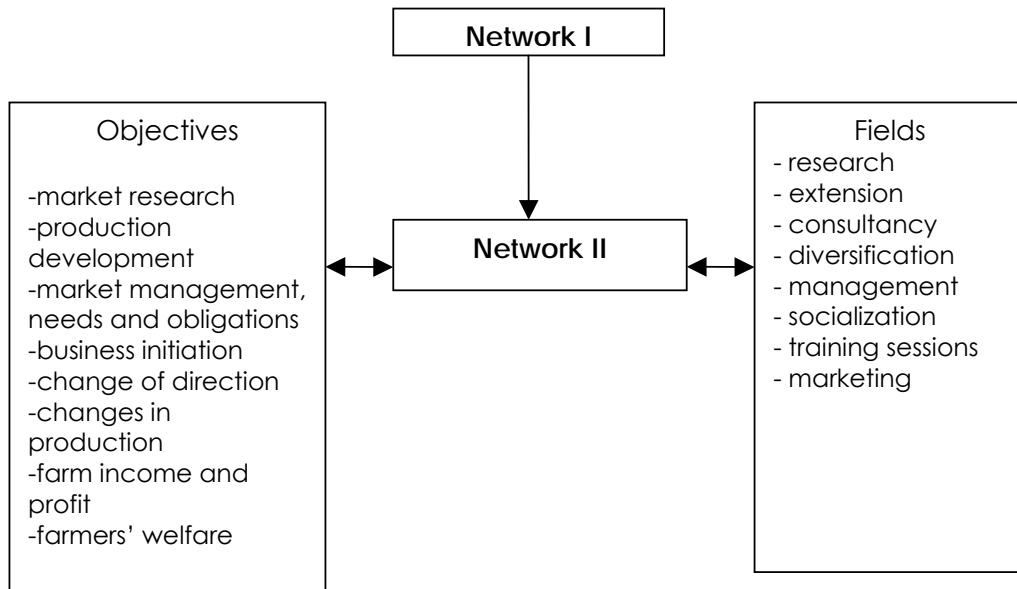


To sum up, the philosophy of the two networks operation, as well the relationships between them as regards the information transfer are presented in the next figure.

Network I – Research and extension project	Network II – Farmers' association
1. Fields of activity	
Research and extension	Production, processing, marketing
2. Operation rules	
Established by the funding body's set of rules	Own rules, according to the legislation into effect
3. Existence	
Limited	Unlimited
4. Staff	
Researchers, teaching staff and other categories of specialists accepted by the funding body	Performant farmers, processors and agricultural input suppliers
5. Funding	
From the budget	Own funds

The information transfer to the second network was identified into specific fields and objectives, namely:

Figure 5. Objectives and operation fields of the Rural Extension and Development Consortium Association



It results that the approach order was from objectives towards the fields of interest. Both the objectives and the fields were formulated taking into consideration, first of all, the Common Agricultural Policy

orientations, which mainly focus upon extensive research and agricultural diversification.

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