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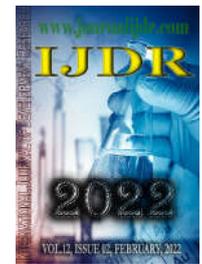
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INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND RURAL EXTENSION IN COOPERATIVES OF FAMILY FARMING

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ABSTRACT

The initiatives in extension actuation advising cooperatives of family farming on the management cover important specificities so that they have satisfactory effectiveness. This article showed, through the systematization of notes, bibliographical and documentary research and participant observation, the relation between the themes of interdisciplinarity, rural extension and cooperativism of family farming, demonstrating their applications through the performance of the “MaisGestão” project. It was concluded that the extension professionals faces challenges for management assistance, both in terms of the scope of interdisciplinary work, but also in the complexity of the cooperative organization and in the provision of autonomy and emancipation of those assisted.

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INTRODUCTION

Firstly, we consider that interdisciplinarity is the ability to break the conceptual, discursive and theoretical ties, by which we were taught since our childhood and that lasts during our academic and professional life (POMBO, 2005). It requires an attitude that accepts the interrelation and interdependence of physical, biological, psychological, social and cultural phenomena. “This vision requires transcending disciplinary and conceptual boundaries” (CESCO; MOREIRA; LIMA, 2014, p. 66).

Pombo (2005) in a recognized conference about the topic, joked by confessing that he does not know how to do interdisciplinarity,

In fact, going a little further, I dare to think that no one knows. Interdisciplinarity is even capable of not being anything you do. It lies somewhere between a voluntarist project, something that we want to do, that we want to do and, at the same time, something that, regardless of our will, we are inexorably doing, whether we like it or not (POMBO, 2005, p.04).

The author emphasizes that interdisciplinarity requires sensitive postures, for example, the complexity of the world, and active ones to look for common points and not divergences, curiosity, taste for actions developed in collaboration, cooperation, for working together in addition to an interest in what the other has as much to say as to do. There will only be interdisciplinarity if we are able to share our small domain of knowledge, if we abandon the comfort of our technical language and venture into a domain that belongs to everyone and of which no one is the exclusive owner (POMBO, 2005, p. 16).

Pursuant to Brazilian Law n. 12,188, established on 11th January 2010, Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ATER) means

non-formal continuing education service in rural areas, which promotes management, production, processing and commercialization of agricultural and non-agricultural activities and services, including extractives, forestry, and artisanal activities (BRASIL, 2010).

Through the Brazilian Law n. 12,188, the National Policy for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension for Family Farming and

Agrarian Reform (PNATER) was instituted, whose beneficiaries are agrarian reform settlers, indigenous, remnants of *quilombos* and other peoples and traditional communities, family farmers or rural family businesses, foresters, fish farmers, extractives, fishermen, as well as the beneficiaries of colonization and irrigation programs. In the same legislative text, the objectives of PNATER are support economic initiatives, advise the different phases of economic activities, business and organizational management, market insertion and support for associations and cooperativism, among others. The principles of the PNATER advocates the adoption of participatory methodologies, with an interdisciplinary approach, where, even for the accreditation of an executing institution, it is necessary to prove a technical staff with different training, which covers the specific areas of the activity, to get the goals effectively. To be considered a cooperative or association of family farming in Brazil, according to the current regulatory framework, they need to have more than 50% of its members as family farmers, proven by an official document called DAP. In the case of central cooperatives, this percentage will be evaluated in the sum of the family farm members of all cooperatives affiliated to it (MAPA, 2019).

This article systematizes the notes made during the panel held at the Symposium on Strategies and Cooperation in Family Farming, organized by College of Higher Education from São Miguel do Iguaçú (FAESI), where the first author was a speaker on 13th October 2020. The information presented here comes from bibliographic and documentary research and participant observation (GIL, 2008) in an ATER project for cooperatives of family farming. The main objective was to relate the themes interdisciplinarity, rural extension and cooperativism of family farming, based on the proposal of the panel and the debates that had taken place during the event.

Interdisciplinary Rural Extension¹ in Cooperatives of Family Farming – *Mais Gestão* project

The *Mais Gestão* project was instituted by the extinct Brazilian Ministry of Agrarian Development, had its first edition implemented in the years 2012 to 2016, and a second one in 2018 to 2021, this last under the coordination of the National Agency for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ANATER).

The *Mais Gestão* methodology is singular with a multidisciplinary approach that allows the identification and solution of technical, managerial and technological problems, in order to increase competitiveness and promote a culture of social and economic sustainability in family farming ventures (DATER, 2012, p.03).

Based on the project methodology, the cooperatives benefited should be advised in six areas: Organizational management; Financial management; Commercial management; Human resources management; Industrial management; and Environmental Management. It should be noted that at no time was it found, both in the manuals and in the guidelines received in training on the project, that there would be superiority of one area or another in the development of project actions or in the day-to-day activities of the beneficiaries. However, with the execution of the project, the understanding that ended up being revealed was that the organizational management could be highlighted as central and the other areas orbiting around it, depending on “their gravitational action” to remain active in the system. Analyzing the documents of the project, it was noted that in each of these areas, a set of professionals, based on their academic training, could be recruited to act as extensionists, both at a technical and higher (including technological) graduate. In financial management area, that includes

fields like costs, taxes, controls, planning among others, we noticed a great congruence with the formations in the areas of accounting, administration, management in general and economic sciences. To the commercial management area which englobe aspects alluding to the visual identity of products, brands, product positioning and other aspects, we noticed a certain approximation with formation in the fields of administration, communication with qualification in publicity, advertising and marketing, as well as commercial management graduation. Relating to human resources management area, where are involved the cooperatives employees (even though in the researched ones the incidence of these agents is minimal) it was perceived attributions normally given to professionals formed in administration, psychology, pedagogy, and technologists especially those in areas of human resources. About to the industrial management area, where it can be found process relating to food processing, professionals trained in agronomic engineering, production engineering, food engineering, veterinarians, nutritionists and administrators are commonly required. To the environmental management, the practices are more commons with those found in the environmental engineering, agronomic and forestall ones, as in the environmental management degree. And proposedly in the end, the organizational management area, since in our understanding there are many specific aspects about cooperativism, and that an extensionist who is going to dedicate himself to advise the demands of this area, fundamentally needs to know the details of this such a peculiar organizational movement. In this sense, this is a special space, where, for example, the technologist or bachelor's degree in cooperative management² have a fundamental role, given their training focused on the “interdisciplinary” universe in which a cooperative is involved.

However, it is worth mentioning that specific knowledge about cooperativism is not only accessible to people “between the walls of schools”, and that a professional graduate in another area can through their effort or interest, seek this qualification or even practical knowledge to be able to know the peculiar paths of cooperative management. In our understanding, one of the great challenges for cooperatives of family farming, and more precisely, a challenge for the area of organizational management, is to promote, encourage, or facilitate people's participation. With this understanding, the statement that “the most assertive investment for cooperatives is in people education, in the social framework, in the participation of cooperative members, in the appreciation and daily practice of democracy” (GREGOLIN et al, 2018, p. 15) is assertive because they are the ones who will carry out organizational management, will exercise governance, depending on the structure of the organization, with support or sometimes even alone.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Interdisciplinarity is a challenge for us, given the culture of fragmentation of knowledge and actions (such as the division of *Mais Gestão* project actions into six areas). It is a challenge because we were educated to “departmentalize”, to “discipline”, to “sector” the training, roles, jobs, etc. The interdisciplinary posture requires that we break with the concepts and theories that support our historical academic formation. A rural extension project for cooperatives is faced with an enormous challenge, given not only the complexity of an organization management, but the complexity of this type of cooperative organization, which is based on, among other aspects, the seven principles of cooperativism that expand the challenge to extensionists to advise this organizational model. The management extensionist in a cooperative of family farming, necessarily needs, more than any other who will dedicate himself to other sectors, to be attentive and committed to the postures that facilitate interdisciplinarity. This article confirms this, showing that the rural

¹ Frequently in the university, we witness either the debate on the antagonism between the processes of “technical assistance” and “rural extension”, or the choice, depending on the theoretical position of the authors, of one expression or another. In our understanding, the expression that comes closest to the concept of service that is sought is that of “rural extension”.

² It is true that, within the diversity of the cooperative's branches, sometimes it may be that a particular course, even in the cooperative management degrees, does not meet some detail of a segment, however, the general structure of a cooperative is very well addressed in cooperative manager training.

extension for these enterprises need to be a systemic and holistic process, carried out by one or more agents, aimed at supporting organizations, considering their complexity, integrating, and not fragmenting weaknesses, demands or actions. Furthermore, the working process must always consider the possible relationships and/or specific impacts on the dynamics of another management aspect or the entire enterprise, aiming at the autonomy and emancipation of managers, board and cooperative members.

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