
Cooperation in Rural Russia: Past, Present and Future¹

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The authors consider cooperation as a specific, alternative form of economic organization to the standard business firm within a market economy, and focus on agricultural cooperation in Russia. First, the article engages with the key milestones of the history of cooperation in Russia: (1) the first attempts to establish cooperative organizations before the Russian Revolution (agricultural societies, agricultural partnerships and credit cooperatives) which gave the poor rural population a chance to improve living standards and ensured promising prospects for the long-term development of cooperation in all forms; (2) the dependent forms of consumer and production cooperation under the Soviet regime that deprived all collective forms of their true cooperative nature. In the second part of the article, the authors describe the current state of the cooperative movement in the Russian countryside and identify its basic features, such as opposition to family farming and the state capitalist tendencies of the concentration and vertical integration in the form of agroholdings; state

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rural cooperation policies which aim to promote and financially support small farming including the development of rural cooperatives; the number and types of cooperatives in the countryside; the reasons for debates on cooperation legislation; the viability of the main types of agricultural cooperatives (production, consumer, credit cooperation). Finally, the authors emphasize that cooperation in contemporary Russia does not fit the classic Western scheme of cooperative development and still has to overcome a number of substantial challenges (the soviet legacy, lack of bottom-up initiatives, the ideological and economic dominance of large-scale farming, poor academic expertise in the field of cooperation studies).

Key words: cooperation, agricultural cooperatives, cooperation development, rural Russia, economic theory of cooperation

Introduction: interpretations of the term ‘cooperation’

The term ‘cooperation’ in this context has at least two meanings that still need some clarification. The first regards cooperation in the broad sense as a form of labor organization characterized by joint action or collective work, i.e., a synonym for social interaction and mutual help. For instance, Kropotkin (1972), a prominent representative of anarchist thought, favored such interpretation and counterposed it to both individualism and the state as a third (cooperative) way of social development.

We consider cooperation in its narrower meaning, i.e., as a specific form of economic organization within the national labor market including, but not limited to, ‘cooperatives’ as companies (legal entities) and ‘cooperators’ as their members. Such an organizational form, alternative to the standard business firm, is typical for capitalist market economies. Classic examples of such cooperatives are the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers (consumer cooperative) in Great Britain, the Schulze-Delitzsch and Raiffeisen credit unions in Germany, which became a cooperative model not only in Europe but also in Russia after the abolition of serfdom.

Furthermore, we consider only classic agricultural cooperation² We clarify this by drawing on the example of the dairy cooperative (cooperation is widespread in dairy production across the world). Several family dairy farms invest in the construction of a small processing factory, hire a director, managers, and workers, and sell milk to this factory, which becomes a processing cooperative (though national legal systems can define it differently)³ owned and supplied by family farmers (unlike the factory staff, they are cooperative members). The factory staff receive payment but not profit, which is distributed among the family farms according to the volumes of milk supplied. Family farmers can also purchase forage jointly, saving money and establishing a supply cooperative; they can also create a credit cooperative as an alternative to the system of bank credit. Russian legislation qualifies all these types of cooperation as consumer cooperatives, and also identifies agricultural production cooperatives engaged in collective farming that existed before the Revolution as *artels* and after collectivization as *kolkhozes*.

² The so-called ‘new generation cooperatives’ (NGC) are significantly different from the classic principles of cooperation [Coltrain, Barton, Boland 2000; Gurung, Unterschultz 2007].

³ The diversity of national cooperative legislation is considered in [Groeneveld 2016; Cracogna et al. 2013].

One of the distinctive features of a classic cooperative is that its members are its owners, clients and (in production cooperatives) workers. Sometimes the discrepancy between cooperatives and business firms is defined as the opposition of member-owned and investor-owned enterprises. According to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), “a cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise”, i.e., cooperation implies (a) voluntary and open membership, (b) democratic control, (c) the economic participation of members, (d) autonomy and independence, (e) education, training and information, (f) cooperation of cooperatives, and (g) concerns for community⁴.

Unfortunately, these principles are not yet widely implemented in rural Russia. While cooperation is considered worldwide an important part of national economy, especially in agriculture [Borzaga, Galera 2012; Zeuli, Cropp 2004], in Russia cooperation seems to be the most backward element of the national agriculture. According to ICA, about 1 billion cooperative members worldwide provide an annual revenue of about \$3 trillion (though unequal regional distribution of cooperatives should be taken into account) [Measuring the Size and Scope 2014]. “There are two tribes of business ownership. Despite the focus on stock markets, it is [the] cooperative enterprise that touches the lives of more people.[...] There are three times as many member owners of cooperatives as individual shareholders worldwide” [Mayo 2012, p. 3]. Agricultural cooperation is highly developed in Europe [Bijman, Iliopoulos, Poppe, Gijssels, Hagedron, Hanisch, Hendrikse, Kühl, Ollila, Pyykkönen, van der Sangen 2012], and holds strong positions in the United States accounting “in marketing and input supply for about a third of both total farm sector revenue and input purchases” [Deller, Hoyt, Hueth, Sundaram-Stukel 2009, p. 16]. The weak and even marginal position of agricultural cooperation in Russia is more striking if one takes into account its rapid development in this country in the early 20th century.

The Soviet regime strongly (and negatively) affected Russian cooperation; however, the authors aim here is to evaluate its current situation. In the following, we begin by providing a short historical overview of the cooperation movement in Russia and its historical legacy, and then consider modern rural cooperation – its structure, legal framework, state policies, and examples of failure and success.

Key features of Russian cooperation history

Cooperation before the Revolution

The first attempts to establish cooperative organizations in the form of ‘production artels’ can be traced back to the 17th century [Kalachev 1864; Isaev 1881; Shherbina 1881; Sbornik materialov ob artelyakh v Rossii 1873]. It is no exaggeration to say that fisheries in the White Sea (being of significant economic importance at that time) almost entirely consisted of artels – both male and female artels of Archangelsk which specialized

⁴ <http://ica.coop/en/what-co-operative>.

in exports [Ostrovskaya 1913; Vvedensky 1922]. For peasant country, it was quite natural that most cooperatives except for consumer and credit cooperatives in cities were agricultural. The first cooperatives in the form of societies and partnerships were established in 1865, right after the liberation of peasants in 1861, the introduction of zemstvos (local self-governments) in 1864, and other reforms.

Agricultural societies were primarily educational and cultural organizations without capital or financial responsibility of members for the cooperative obligations. However, agricultural societies such as the Free Economic Society and the Moscow Agricultural Society played an important role in the Russian cooperative movement [Morachevsky 1914; Glebov 1908; Bradley 2009]. By 1915, there were about 6,000 agricultural societies at national and regional (province, volost, and uyezd) levels that were to develop peasant agronomy as non-government and non-profit organizations. They were also engaged in educational activities and in the economic support of farmers for the purchase of modern agricultural machinery, high-quality seeds and fertilizers, marketing of agricultural produce, etc. [Morachevsky 1914; Elina 2008]. Agricultural societies were typically founded by zemsky activists (mainly agronomists), peasants, local landowners, priests, and teachers [Morachevsky 1914, p. 197]. Agricultural societies became pioneers of the cooperative movement in the countryside followed by credit partnerships and consumer societies.

Agricultural partnerships were established by smallholders primarily in European Russia (Poland and the Baltic states) [Emelianoff 1919, p. 90] as creditworthy business enterprises with capital invested by their members, which made them viable and stable. Member fees were quite small to ensure access to for a wide range of rural households. Agricultural partnerships had all the cooperative features including the distribution of profits according to the activities of a given member [Emelianoff 1919; Antsiferov 1929]. For instance, in consumer partnerships the more goods a member purchased through the partnership, the larger profit he/she earned (due to lower prices); dairy partnerships ensured larger profits for the members that supplied more milk to the cooperative (due to higher purchase prices); the surplus in revenues and expenditures in sales partnerships was distributed according to the volume of produce sold through the organization, i.e. the profit of members depended on the prices. Partnership charters distributed dividends (5–7%) on the invested capital as in a joint stock company [Emelianoff 1919, p. 93]. Agricultural partnerships did not lead to the collective farming and were truly cooperative by their nature.

Credit cooperatives became the basis of agricultural cooperation. In rural areas, the extensive network of credit cooperatives undermined the most predatory forms of usury, and gradually became an integral part of the rural peasant economy. Credit cooperatives strongly contributed to the development of Russian agriculture in the early 20th century [Bilimovich 2005, p. 73].

For the first fifty years, the Russian cooperative movement achieved success by giving the rural population a chance to improve living standards quickly and significantly. Cooperatives were the only mass movement uniting all social classes on a voluntary basis – 10 to 20 million people were members of more than 50,000 cooperatives [Bilimovich 2005, p. 8, 52]; some authors state that 10.5 million rural households (60 million people, i.e. 1/3 of the Russian population) were members of different cooperatives [Antsiferov 2011, p. 6].

In 1915, the all-Russian Center for cooperative committees was established; later it evolved into the all-Russian Council of cooperative congresses that formally coordinated

the cooperative movement in the country. The Council was established in March 1917 at the all-Russian Cooperative Congress for the further coordination of the aims and actions of cooperative movement. The Provisional Government legalized the Council, which formed a central apparatus to coordinate diverse cooperative organizations for the first time in Russian history. In contrast, the government in Imperial Russia prevented cooperatives from uniting considering them a potential source of revolutionary ideas. After the Revolution, however, the Bolsheviks dismissed the Council.

Before the Revolution, Russia was among the world leaders in the number of cooperative organizations and their membership, so the prospects for the long-term development of cooperation in all forms were promising [*Bilimovich 2005; Antsiferov 1929*]. Agricultural cooperation laid the foundations for the economic and cultural development of the Russian countryside for at least 1/3 of peasant farmers who freely joined cooperatives [*Bilimovich 2005*].

Cooperation in Soviet Russia

By 1918-20, the Bolshevik regime subordinated consumer cooperation to the Soviet government, and cooperative organizations became distribution agencies under the control of the state. The Soviet government established its own central agency of consumer cooperation – Centrosoyuz (Central Union) – instead of the dismissed Council of cooperative congresses. Such political measures were justified by the Civil War. Under ‘military communism’, distribution replaced exchange or trade with the help of previous cooperative distribution channels, which contradicted the very nature of cooperation. Under the ‘New Economic Policy’ (1920s) cooperation was formally revived, especially credit and trade cooperatives in cities; rural households were allowed to found agricultural partnerships. However, the most important function of rural cooperatives for the Soviet government was processing and supplying agricultural production to (starving) cities.

Agricultural production cooperatives were traditional for the Russian peasantry in the form of artels with communal ownership and use of land, tools and most of the cattle. Soviet kolkhozes were the successors of this tradition, though their members possessed some individual property (a house, a little plot of land, cattle, etc.). At the beginning, peasants were allowed to freely decide to enter a kolkhoz or not; later, under the forced collectivization, kolkhozes completely lost their cooperative nature and became the key organizational form in the countryside.

On the one hand, the Soviet cooperation system consisted of thousands of primary organizations (the first level of cooperation) and millions of members at the higher levels (unions of cooperatives, or the second level of cooperation). On the other hand, the system featured excessive bureaucracy, detailed standardization and regulation in accordance with state plans and requirements which were often ridiculous. Consumer societies lost their independence and became state distribution agencies. In the countryside, only Centrosoyuz survived though without any cooperative spirit.

The cumbersome Soviet cooperation system was designed to work for the state. Cooperative managers were not elected – they were appointed and dismissed according to the will of the Party. The property rights of neither the cooperatives

nor their members and employees were secure since they could be easily violated by arbitrary decisions of the higher authorities. The most important cooperative principles were neglected or ignored. Therefore, Soviet cooperatives became similar to state enterprises [Bilimovich 2005].

Cooperation in contemporary Russian countryside

Family farming versus state capitalism

One of the basic theses of cooperative theory is that the major driver and beneficiary of rural cooperation are small agricultural producers, i.e. family farmers (entrepreneurs) and households (self-subsistence agriculture). In the recent decades, Russian agriculture went through radical transformations aiming to replace the Soviet collective model with market institutions. Initially the reformers declared family farmers the key future agricultural producer in the country. However, the role of family farmers in the agricultural GDP remains insignificant. At the same time, the post-Soviet economic crisis fostered the rapid growth of household plots [Kalugina 2001]⁵: In 2013, agricultural enterprises produced 49% of agricultural GDP, households – 41%, and family farms – only 10% [Russia in Figures 2014]. Moreover, in the early 2000s the share of households was even higher – more than 50% – because the critical situation in the 1990s forced the rural and urban population to use their household plots to survive. Many anticipated that the economic recovery since the early 2000s would inevitably reduce the role of household production [Pallot, Nefedova 2007; Nefedova 2003; Patsiorkovskiy, Wegren, O'Brien 2006].

Since early 2000s, there has been a strong tendency to concentrate and vertically integrate agriculture in the form of mega-farms (agroholdings) replacing medium-sized enterprises [Uzun, Shagaida, Saraikin 2012; Rylko, Jolly 2005]. Agroholdings receive substantial state support in the majority of the developed agrarian regions of the Russian South: Belgorod [Epshtein, Hahlbrock, Wandel 2013], Tatarstan [Nefedova 2015], Krasnodar [Nikulin 2003]. The government and regional elites support all forms of the consolidation of agricultural enterprises providing them with much more resources than small agricultural producers [Uzun 2005]. On the one hand, this policy has had some positive results: for instance, Russia has become one of the world leaders in grain exports. On the other hand, giant agroholdings face management difficulties and low efficiency [Visser, Spoor, Mamonova 2014] in industries with long payback period (such as dairy production) [Nefedova 2015]. Nevertheless, the federal government and regional administrations continue to support large corporate farms rather than small producers.

Moreover, family farmers themselves are not widely engaged in rural cooperation. Therefore, both Russian agrarian scholars and state officials) admit to the poor development of rural cooperation [Fedorov 2013].

⁵ The Russian statistics identifies three types of agricultural producers: (1) agricultural enterprises, (2) family (peasant) farms registered as entrepreneurs, and (3) household plots, i.e. subsidiary farming.

State rural cooperation policy

Despite the fact that the state openly favors large agricultural producers, the government does not completely ignore small farmers. Several state programs exist to promote small farming including the development of rural cooperatives. In 2006–7, the national project ‘The Development of the AIC (agro-industrial complex)’ introduced state support for small producers (including households) and their cooperatives by subsidizing credit. However, the project was adopted only after a series of heated debates on whether the support should actually target small rather than exclusively large-scale producers. Moreover, small farms enjoyed fewer restrictions in access to subsidies than large enterprises, and cooperatives had even less restrictions compared to individual farmers [Barsukova 2007]. The project stimulated the establishment of agricultural credit cooperatives through the involvement of ‘Rosselkhozbank’ (Russian agricultural bank) as an associate member.

In 2008, the national project evolved into the state program for agricultural development which also implied the development of consumer cooperatives with subsidized credit. According to the current program for 2013–20 [Gosudarstvennaya programma razvitiya sel’skogo khozyajstva 2014], the state tries to ensure development of small farms, initiated by the national project ‘The Development of the AIC’.

Another initiative ‘The Concept for the Development of Cooperation in Rural Areas until 2020’ was adopted at the First all-Russian Congress of rural cooperatives in March 2013 [Kontseptsiya razvitiya kooperatsii 2013]. The initiative calls for a number of economic, legal, consulting and educational measures to promote rural cooperatives. In 2015, the ‘Strategy for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas’ was adopted [Strategiya ustojchivogo razvitiya sel’skikh territorij 2015] to further promote rural cooperation, which is now considered a key mechanism for sustainable rural development (targeting 12% in average annual growth of cooperative revenue).

The number and types of cooperatives in the countryside

Cooperation in rural areas is regulated primarily by the two laws – ‘On Agricultural Cooperation’ and ‘On Consumer Cooperation’ – because Russian legislation identifies two types of agricultural cooperatives. The first type includes agricultural *production* cooperatives (SPK⁶) and the second type includes agricultural *consumer* cooperatives (SPoK) including credit cooperatives (SKPK). Production cooperatives are commercial organizations, while consumer cooperatives and societies (PO) are non-profit organizations (*Table 1*).

However, there are still debates on cooperation legislation [Kurakin 2017]. According to its critics, the current legislation ignores the common nature of all cooperative organizations by dividing them into commercial production cooperatives and non-profit consumer cooperatives, i.e., it declares that the adjective ‘consumer’ by definition changes the main goal of cooperative, and therefore its tax regulation. In other words, the fragmented Russian legislation contributes neither to the sustainable development and competitiveness

⁶ Hereinafter we use transliterated Russian abbreviations.

of cooperation, nor to the strengthening of the cooperative sector and the cooperative movement [Buzdalov 2007]. The response to this criticism is that the double nature of the current cooperation legislation, which distinguishes production and consumer cooperatives adequately reflects the reality and the historical trajectory of Russian cooperation [Vershinin 2008]. The number of different types of cooperatives is shown in Table 2. According to more recent data (January 2014), there are 6,913 consumer cooperatives including 1,846 credit cooperatives [Strategiya ustojchivogo razvitiya sel'skikh territorij 2015].

Table 1. The legal bases of rural cooperation in Russia

<p><i>Agricultural cooperative</i> – an organization established by agricultural producers and (or) owners of private subsidiary holdings on the basis of voluntary membership for joint production or other economic activities based on the consolidation of property shares to meet material and other needs of its members (Federal Law No.193 adopted on 08.12.1995 (ed. on 04.11.2014 with changes effective from 16.11.2014) ‘On Agricultural Cooperation’)</p>		<p><i>Consumer society</i> – a voluntary association of citizens and (or) legal entities established for trade, procurement, production or other activities to meet material and other needs of its members (Federal Law No.3085-1 adopted on 19.06.1992 (ed. on 02.07.2013) ‘On Consumer Cooperation (Consumer Societies and Their Unions) in the Russian Federation’)</p>
<p>An agricultural <i>production</i> cooperative is established by citizens for joint production, processing and marketing of agricultural products, and for other activities not prohibited by the law and based on the labor of its members</p>	<p>An agricultural <i>consumer</i> cooperative is established by agricultural producers and (or) owners of private subsidiary holdings provided their participation in its economic activities</p>	<p>It is established on a territorial and membership basis by the consolidation of its members’ property shares for trade, procurement, production and other activities to meet material and other needs of its members</p>
<p>Commercial organization</p>		<p>Non-profit organization</p>
<p>The number of members should <i>not be less than 5</i></p>	<p>The number of members should <i>not be less than 2 legal entities or 5 citizens; for a credit cooperative – not less than 15 citizens and (or) 5 legal entities</i></p>	<p>The number of founders should <i>not be less than 5 citizens and (or) 3 legal entities</i></p>
<p>The number of employees (except for seasonal workers) should not exceed the number of its members. Types of cooperatives: an <i>agricultural artel (collective farm)</i> is established by citizens, whose shares can be transferred to the common fund of land plots; a <i>cooperative farm</i> is established by the heads of peasant farms or households without establishing a common land fund</p>	<p>At least 50% of activities should be provided to the members of cooperative. Types of cooperative: processing, sales, service (including credit and insurance), supply, gardening and livestock cooperatives</p>	<p>The patronage established by the general meeting of the consumer society should not exceed 20% of its total income and has to be distributed among its members proportionally to the participation in the economic activities or according to their share size</p>
<p>Patronage and losses are distributed among members according to their participation in cooperative activities</p>	<p>Losses are covered exclusively by additional contributions of members within three months after their approval of the annual balance (art. 123.3 of the Civil Code)</p>	
<p>A cooperative established funds that make up its property; the types and size of the funds, their formation and use are set by the general meeting of the cooperative according to the law and its charter</p>	<p>The property of a consumer society is <i>not distributed</i> among its members according to their shares (contribution)</p>	
<p><i>A cooperative is not allowed to issue its own securities; the only founding document of the cooperative is its charter; its members have rights and responsibilities, and bear subsidiary liability</i></p>		

Table 2. The number of agricultural cooperatives and rural consumer societies (January 1, 2013)

Cooperative forms	Registered cooperatives		
	Total	Active	% Active
Production cooperatives	12,190*	7,588	62%
Consumer cooperatives	7,349	4,583	62%
Among them: credit cooperatives	1,875	1,252	68%
Consumer societies**	3,100*	2,852	92%

*January 1, 2012

**Centrosojuz organizations

Source: [Kontseptsiya razvitiya kooperatsii 2013, p. 114].

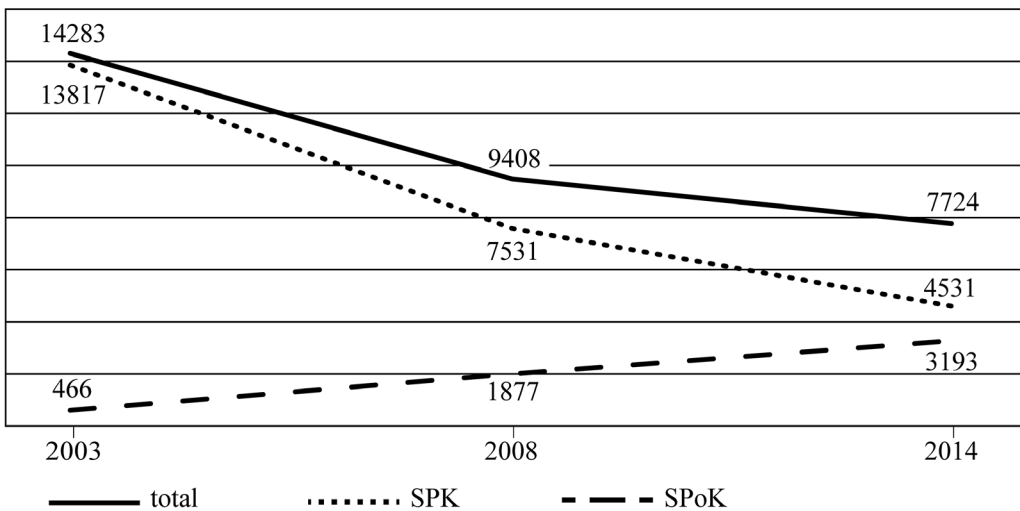


Figure 1. The dynamics of production and consumer agricultural cooperatives (2003–2014)

To understand the dynamics of different agricultural cooperatives, we analyze the official statistical data on active (i.e., those with a non-zero balance) cooperatives for 2003, 2008 and 2014 (Figure 1). The data show that the overall decline in the number of agricultural cooperatives in the 2000s went along with the reduction in the number of production cooperatives (SPK), while the number of consumer cooperatives (SPoK) increased substantially.

The diversity of modern agricultural cooperatives can be traced back to the three historical types of cooperation: (1) SPKs are the direct successors of collective farms; (2) consumer cooperatives of *Centrosoyuz* also originated within the Soviet economic system; (3) new (post-Soviet) SPoKs, i.e., service (supply, marketing, and processing) and credit cooperatives, which originated from neoliberal reforms in 1990-s. The latter are largely represented by the members of the Russian Association of Peasants (family farmers) and Agricultural Cooperatives. Some consumer cooperatives (ca. 100) are either members of the Federal Union of agricultural consumer cooperatives or of the Union of Rural Credit Cooperation (ca. 200). Thus, consumer cooperatives include diverse organizations, which are hard to classify using formal legal criteria. In the following, we consider SPKs, the consumer societies of *Centrosoyuz*, post-Soviet consumer cooperatives, and credit cooperatives separately.

Agricultural production cooperatives (SPK)

From the perspective of the global cooperative movement, SPKs are strange organizations, i.e., they are not true cooperatives in the Western sense [*Gardner, Lerman 2006*] because they are the corporate successors to collective and state farms, which evolved under the agrarian reform of the early 1990s. They are deeply rooted in the Russian countryside, in the traditions of collective farming, and from this point of view they are very similar to collective farms. However, they are expected to vanish in all post-socialist countries, as they already have in the West (unlike marketing and supply cooperatives). The short history of SPKs has witnessed parabolic fluctuations in their number: it grew in the 1990s and reached its maximum (more than 15,000) in the early 2000s, and then started a steady decline – from 2001 to 2012 the number of SPKs fell by one third [*Kontseptsiya razvitiya kooperatsii 2013*].

The viability of SPKs is puzzling to Western scholars seeking to identify their historical (mainly Soviet) legacy and institutional roots [*Golovina, Nilsson, Wolz 2012*]. According to the interviews of 1,401 SPK members in the Kurgan Region, these members stick to SPK as a form of organization because of the enormous transaction costs (e.g. specific assets, uncertainty) involved in a possible transition to another organizational form [*Golovina, Nilsson, Wolz 2013*]. In other words, there is an obvious ‘path dependence’ (SPK members are stuck in cooperatives as they were in collective farms before) determined by SPK members’ motives (unwillingness to risk, dream of a quiet life, Soviet habits of collectivism, etc.) and SPK management interests (to retain employees). Despite the lack of prospects, SPKs played a significant role in the Russian agricultural history, and they still have the potential to occupy a certain (most likely minor and subordinate) niche in the Russian agricultural system.

Centrosoyuz

The Soviet government established *Centrosoyuz* as a substitute for prerevolutionary consumer cooperation. It was a centralized and vertically integrated system of consumer

societies from rural settlements to the national apex organization: rural consumer societies constituted district (rayon) unions that formed (and were controlled by) regional (oblast, republic) unions constituting the central organization – Centrosoyuz.

In the Soviet period, Centrosoyuz had many primary cooperative organizations (consumer societies) and was mainly engaged in trade through rural cooperative grocery stores and in purchasing agricultural produce from the rural population. Such trade brought important social benefits because Centrosoyuz was sometimes the only organization that provided the countryside with essential commodities, especially the remote settlements. In 1990, the consumer cooperation provided services for 40% of population with 30 million rural dwellers as cooperative members. Previously it provided half of the yields of potatoes and a third of all bread produce; its consumer societies purchased a third of vegetables. However, alcohol and cigarettes sometimes constituted up to a third of Centrosoyuz trade [*Sobolev* 2016].

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Centrosoyuz managed to keep its basic activities⁷ and trade still dominates: in 2012 retail trade constituted up to 70% of Centrosoyuz activities, of which 76% were food sales⁸. Trade through consumer societies is still focused on the countryside (80% of retail stores are located in rural areas), but the role of consumer cooperatives for rural areas substantially decreased compared to the Soviet period. While in 1990 the share of cooperative trade was 84% of the total consumer turnover in rural areas, now it accounts only for 13% [*Strategiya ustojchivogo razvitiya sel'skikh territorij* 2015]. However, this decline of consumer cooperation can be explained by the growth of private entrepreneurship in the countryside after the collapse of the Soviet economic model.

The key problems of the Soviet era are still affecting the post-soviet Centrosoyuz cooperative system [*Sobolev* 2009; *Sobolev* 2012]. The image of cooperatives is still quite negative: people often do not trust cooperatives, cooperatives lost most of their members and have little to promise, cooperative members did not become true holders of their organizations (the latter are often controlled by external actors pursuing their own interests), and consumer societies kept leaving rural areas for more attractive markets and larger commercial benefits. In 1990s, Centrosoyuz cooperators (bureaucrats) successfully privatized cooperative assets (wholesale warehouses, markets, retail stores, public catering, etc.) and established private business: these profitable (for their managers) enterprises enjoy the legally protected status of non-profit organizations and make profit as private firms ignoring the interests of the primary cooperative members. Being formally the property of consumer unions of different levels (district, region), these enterprises have clear corporate nature and are engaged in real estate transactions, trade, production, processing, educational services, etc.

The lack of true and interested owners led to the poor functioning and unprofitability of cooperatives. Consumer societies and their enterprises are technologically weak and slow to implement innovations. The profitability of cooperative trade is about 1%, but many stores are supported by federal and regional funding at the expense of taxpayers. For instance, in 2014, consumer societies in 35 Russian regions suffered losses of 400 million rubles. In the last decade, the total amount of potatoes, meat and vegetables

⁷ <http://www.rus.coop/en/history>

⁸ <http://rus-coop.www10.pagehost.ru/about/figures/>

purchased from rural households fell by 20-30%. The production of bread, canned food, meat and sausages halved [Paratunin 2015]. There are many other problems which concern the organization of democratic meetings of cooperative members, ensuring fair and competitive elections, the credibility and legitimacy of managers, financial transparency, corruption, retaining regional consumer unions, etc. In other words, since about a decade ago we have witnessed a systemic crisis of Centrosoyuz.

Consumer cooperatives

The new post-Soviet cooperatives do not have the negative Soviet background that hinders the cooperatives with a Soviet legacy. The former are member-oriented while the latter are state-oriented. In recent decades, the number of consumer cooperatives has grown significantly under the state programs starting with the national project 'the Development of the AIC'. In 2006-13, their number grew fivefold [Strategiya ustojchivogo razvitiya sel'skikh territorij 2015], and the growth continued after the project finished. However, agricultural consumer cooperatives still satisfy less than 1% of their members' needs [Kontsepsiya razvitiya kooperatsii 2013]. Moreover, there is not enough statistical data to estimate the real situation, especially the daily operations and internal processes within newly established consumer cooperatives.

Let us consider two case studies showing both a failure and a relative success of cooperation, and the specific feature of cooperation is to be strongly dependent on regional authorities.

The situation in Kurgan region, where local authorities attempted to establish consumer cooperatives represents a case of failure [Golovina, Nilsson 2011]. The administrative plan for establishing such cooperatives in the region was only partly fulfilled: the average number of cooperative members did not exceed 8, and the majority of members were comprised of households (not family farmers). The resulting cooperatives were very fragile because the regional government was acting formally and founded cooperatives without carefully evaluating their future prospects. Local officials did not have appropriate expertise in cooperation. Fostering cooperation top-down could be meaningful and successful, as long as it relies on the support (rather than skepticism) of the members of cooperatives [Golovina, Nilsson 2009].

Belgorod region, on the other hand, provides the case of relative success [Kurakin 2012; Kurakin, Visser 2017]. Unlike in Kurgan region, the Belgorod government sought to develop rural cooperation as an important mechanism to support small farmers and ensure sustainable rural development, even though the region's agriculture relies primarily on livestock agrohholdings. In 2007, the regional program 'Belgorod Family Farms' was adopted in order to develop rural cooperatives. According to this program, small farmers and their cooperatives were not expected to demonstrate impressive economic performance; rather the program was more socially oriented. The number of supply and marketing cooperatives rocketed from two dozen to two hundred, and they became very active organizations. However, they did not become true cooperatives according to classic cooperation principles. Cooperative membership is quite formal; members are not responsible for the economic results of their cooperative; management makes all the decisions; cooperatives solve most of their problems with the help of

local administration that provides them with an administratively protected market niche (guaranteed sales channels and assistance in resolving issues with their business partners). Therefore, cooperatives are not independent actors in the market, and their members sometimes act as opportunists by selling their produce to external buyers instead of the cooperative considering the latter as only one of many alternative sales channels.

State support for emerging cooperatives is one of the key factors in their success [Henehan, Hardesty, Schultz, Wells 2011]. Certainly, this support does not imply strong administrative control and it should be minimized when cooperatives become mature enough. Unfortunately, in Belgorod the newly established cooperatives demonstrate a weak capacity to compete effectively without state support, which is why neither the regional government nor the cooperative management seek to minimize administrative control.

Another obvious problem is cooperative management. Ordinary members do not control management and are not eager to change this. Managers make all the crucial decisions while pursuing their own interests. The relationships between management and ordinary members resemble the relationships between corporate management and employees rather than the relations between independent partners. Thus, Belgorod cooperatives face the same management problems as cooperatives worldwide. Cooperative management has to combine effective control and cooperative principles, competitiveness and to avoid becoming a capitalist enterprise [Chavez, Sajardo-Moreno 2004; Chavez, Soler, Sajardo 2008]. Belgorod cooperatives did not achieve this.

The common incentive of rural producers for cooperating is to establish a decent share of the market, to get access to business information, and to protect relationship-specific investments (all of these are the advantages of cooperation according to new institutional economics) [Bijman, Hendrikse 2003]. These goals are relevant both for the processors and dealers. However, in both of the cases described above cooperatives were established by an administrative initiative, i.e., by federal and regional authorities. Thus, even the Belgorod cooperation was developed top-down, and most of its typical problems were either not solved at all or were overcome in a very specific way. Yet another important problem is that family farmers are not widely involved in cooperation: most of their cooperatives are just unstable informal unions for land cultivation. As a result, the development of cooperation in Belgorod stopped, and more than 85% of established cooperatives eventually failed [Parkhomov, Petriakova, Khudobina, Izhikova 2015]. Besides, in both cases household cooperation dominates because family farmers strongly resist any attempts to involve them in cooperation.

Credit cooperatives

Agricultural credit cooperatives developed rapidly in post-soviet Russia. In 1996, only 8 credit cooperatives existed. By 2001 their number had risen to 196, and by 2013 there were 1,875 [Kontseptsiya razvitiya kooperatsii 2013]. They provide credit to a significant share of small farms, thus ranking third in this market following Rosselkhozbank and Sberbank (Russia's state-owned and largest savings bank) [Kontseptsiya razvitiya kooperatsii 2013]. Credit cooperatives also provide consumer loans to the rural

population. Some regions managed to develop a viable system of credit cooperatives based on regional support, but the lack of consistent federal state policy does not allow the same positive experience to work across the entire country. After 2011, the growth of credit cooperatives slowed down considerably [Maksimov 2013].

Under the regulation of Russia's Central Bank, credit cooperatives became full participants of the financial market. They carry out the necessary monitoring and supervision of their financial operations to ensure the transparency of agricultural credit cooperation. However, credit cooperation has not yet fully developed, and there is a need for a differentiated approach to the regulation of small and large cooperatives and their associations (at the congresses of rural cooperatives many cooperators complain about excessive regulation). Moreover, one of the main constraints for the development of credit cooperation today is the lack of stable and permanent sources of finance. The success of credit cooperatives depends primarily on their ability to secure funds both from the savings of cooperative members and through external borrowing. The majority of cooperatives have limited sources and opportunities for external borrowing. The experience of their interaction with 'Rosselkhozbank' and other banks showed that agricultural cooperation requires its own central financial institution to link financial markets (including international) and credit cooperatives [Pakhomov 2013].

The need for a central financial institution to facilitate the stable circulation of financial resources in the system of cooperative credit has long been evident in Russia. In his report "Central Banks of Cooperative Credit" one hundred years ago, Antsiferov pointed out the need for the central institution (bank) that would "establish a systematic and continuous connection between a cooperative organization and the global monetary and credit market" [Antsiferov 2011, pp. 122–123].

Russian cooperation: a mixture of dirigisme and utilitarianism

As mentioned, cooperation in contemporary Russia does not fit into the classic Western scheme of cooperative development – neither into the European utopian-ideological scheme (France, Italy, Portugal, and Belgium) nor into the liberal market scheme (Denmark, Netherlands, and the UK) that currently dominate in the EU [Gutiérrez, Atela, Dueñas 2005]. Huge regional differences in Russia also complicate the identification of any general cooperative model for the country.

However, based on such typical parameters of cooperation as ideological inspiration and state support [Gutiérrez, Atela, Dueñas 2005] we can outline at least two features of modern Russian cooperation. First, it lacks any specific ideological basis because cooperation pursues purely utilitarian goals (on the contrary, in tsarist Russia, ideology played a significantly larger role). Second, the state remains one of the key actors of cooperative development. In tsarist Russia, the role of the state in fostering the success of cooperation was obvious though sometimes ambiguous: often the state hindered cooperation as ideologically dangerous (a possible source of communist movements and peasant rebellions). Today, the state does not recognize any dangerous ideology in cooperation, while its role in the development of the cooperative movement still remains crucial. Not only the 'quantity' of government support matters, but also the relevance of state policies, their proper implementation and strong local management.

Conclusions

Despite its long historical tradition, the cooperative sector in contemporary Russia still has to overcome a number of substantial challenges, which are the following:

- 1) *Soviet legacy*: the Soviet forms of cooperation (such as SPKs and Centrosoyuz) have not been eliminated completely. In Russia, as in other CIS and CEE countries, the Soviet heritage of collective agriculture has had an extremely negative impact on the perception of cooperatives today – they are often considered mandatory collective organizations [Gardner, Lerman 2006].
- 2) *Lack of a bottom-up cooperative movement*. Radical market reforms and the subsequent decline in living standards of the majority of population did not provoke self-organization as a possible response to the economic crisis.
- 3) *Dominance of large-scale farms*. Russian agriculture still relies heavily on large farms, even though some scholars say that it could be dangerous to base agriculture on agroholdings [Uzun, Shagaida, Saraikin 2012].
- 4) *Lack of academic expertise*. Russian cooperation researchers have not yet become a part of the international academic tradition. This is particularly surprising given the international recognition of the Russian cooperative thought (Emelianoff, Antsiferov, Totomianz, Tugan-Baranovsky, Chayanov, etc.). However, since the works of these scholars, little progress has been made in the field of theoretical and methodological studies of cooperation. In the Soviet period, this field did not develop properly because the research focused mainly on collective farms and consumer cooperation and followed a simplistic and often politicized interpretation of cooperation. On the other hand, the majority of Russian researchers ignore Russian emigrant cooperative thought which laid the theoretical and methodological foundations for the development of the cooperative movement. Only in the recent years have Russian researchers begun to study their own intellectual legacy. Furthermore, current Russian scholarship desperately lacks empirical studies of active cooperatives, especially at the micro-level. There are very few such works [Yanbykh, Starchenko, Mindrin, Tkach, Krylov 2012], often conducted in cooperation with Western scientists [Nilsson, Volodina, Golovina 2008; Nilsson, Volodina, Golovina 2010]. Reliable quantitative data on agricultural cooperation is essential for such work, although it is not well supplied by national statistical organizations or existing sociological surveys. For instance, ICA regularly collects such data by conducting a global monitoring of cooperatives together with the European Research Institute on Cooperatives and Social Enterprises (Euricse) [World Cooperative Monitor 2015]. Similar work is carried out at the University of Wisconsin [Deller, Hoyt, Hueth, Sundaram-Stukel 2009].

Despite all these difficulties, the Russian state is attempting to revive small-scale production in rural areas, which gives cooperation a chance. There is, in fact, massive potential for its development, i.e., households and family farmers that slowly develop local production and cooperation. Today there are more than 200,000 family farms in the countryside including individual entrepreneurs, with over 2 million market-oriented household plots [Kontseptsiya razvitiya kooperatsii 2013; Strategiya ustojchivogo razvitiya sel'skikh territorij 2015]. 14.5 million families are engaged in horticulture,

4.3 million in gardening, and 19,300 small agricultural organizations provide work for 203,000 people. The situation in the Russian countryside today radically differs from that of Imperial Russia when cooperation flourished. Back then peasant households had a particular interest in cooperation because it was essential for their survival, while today rural dwellers do not depend on it to such an extent and are therefore less engaged in agriculture. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect that agricultural cooperation will repeat its prerevolutionary success, although it has the potential to become an important part of Russian agriculture.

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Кооперативы сельской России: прошлое, настоящее и будущее

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Несмотря на то, что кооперативная деятельность является значимой частью экономики многих стран (особенно в аграрном секторе), в России сельская кооперация – едва ли не самый маргинальный элемент сельского хозяйства страны, что удивительно, если вспомнить, что в начале XX в. российская кооперация переживала бурный рост. Безусловно, серьезное негативное влияние на кооперацию оказал советский период, однако нельзя списывать все неудачи кооперативного движения только на него. Цель статьи – охарактеризовать нынешнее состояние сельской кооперации в России, опираясь на основные исторические этапы ее развития, как в значительной степени определившие сегодняшние трудности в стране, а также описывая форматы сельской кооперации, их сильные и слабые стороны, факторы успешности и причины неудач.

Кооперация в России прошла особый путь. В стране, где сотню лет назад 9/10 населения составляли крестьяне, все кооперативные объединения, за исключением потребительских и кредитных, были тесно связаны с сельским хозяйством. Сельские кооперативы в России зародились (в 1865 г.) и развивались в двух видах: сельскохозяйственные общества и сельскохозяйственные товарищества.

Кооперативное движение за полвека существования добилось больших успехов, позволяя сельскому населению довольно быстро и реально улучшить свои материальные условия. Кооперативы оказались единственным организованным массовым движением, способным объединить все сословия на добровольных началах: свыше 50 тыс. кооперативов охватывали от 10 до 20 млн членов. До революции России принадлежало мировое первенство по числу кооперативных организаций, а по оборотам и числу участников она входила в тройку стран-лидеров. На селе кооперация объединяла больше населения, чем любые иные институты.

В 1918–1920 гг. произошли слом и деформация кооперации, которая перестала быть самоуправляемой и самодостаточной, превратившись в распределительный аппарат. Советская кооперация трансформировалась в крупную систему из тысяч низовых организаций с десятками миллионов членов, но обросла чрезмерной бюрократией: вся ее деятельность нормировалась и регламентировалась часто нелепыми планами и предписаниями властей. Эта громоздкая система не могла удовлетворять запросы миллионов своих членов, потому что работала на советское государство. Советские кооперативы переоплотились в разнovidность государственных предприятий и пародию на подлинную кооперацию.

За последнюю четверть века в сельском хозяйстве России произошли радикальные перемены, связанные с упразднением советской колхозно-совхозной системы и внедрением рыночных институтов. Первоначально реформы предполагали, что главным сельскохозяйственным производителем в стране должно стать фермерское хозяйство, однако его роль в общем объеме сельскохозяйственной продукции остается незначительной, в том числе и потому, что с 2000-х гг. нарастают масштабы концентрации сельскохозяйственного производства за счет укрупнения предприятий и создания сверхкрупных агрохолдингов. Их поддерживают государство и региональные элиты, которые отводят мелким производителям и их кооперативам вспомогательную роль.

Впрочем, в ряде государственных программ прописаны меры по стимулированию мелких форм сельскохозяйственного производства, в частности, развитие сельской кооперации, например, в национальном проекте «Развитие АПК», в про-

должившей данный проект государственной программе на 2013–2020 гг. и в принятой в 2015 г. «Стратегии устойчивого развития сельских территорий».

Кооперация на селе сегодня в основном регулируется законами «О сельскохозяйственной кооперации» и «О потребительской кооперации», поэтому предусмотрено два вида сельскохозяйственных кооперативов: производственные (СПК) – коммерческие организации, и потребительские (СПоК) – некоммерческие организации, в которые входят и кредитные (СКПК). В связи с этим в экспертной среде развернулась полемика по поводу такого двойственного кооперативного законодательства.

Исторически современная сельская кооперация в России имеет три корня: (1) СПК – прямые наследники колхозов; (2) потребительские общества в системе Центросоюза – также порождения советской экономической системы; (3) созданные в постсоветское время кооперативы (сервисные (снабженческие, сбытовые, перерабатывающие) и кредитные). С точки зрения мирового кооперативного опыта СПК не являются кооперативами в привычном на Западе понимании. В начале пореформенного периода СПК были популярной организационной формой, однако впоследствии их количество стало неуклонно сокращаться, и в настоящий момент перспективы СПК довольно туманны.

Центросоюз в советское время был разветвленной организацией, занимающейся торговлей на селе и закупкой сельхозпродукции у населения. С распадом СССР Центросоюз в целом сохранил прежние функции: около 70% его деятельности приходится на розничную торговлю, 76% ее оборота составляют продовольственные товары, 80% магазинов находятся в сельской местности. Однако по сравнению с советским временем роль потребительской кооперации снизилась: в 1990 г. на Центросоюз приходилось 84% товарооборота на селе, сегодня – 13% (вследствие прихода частных предпринимателей).

Создаваемые с нуля в постсоветское время кооперативы не имеют негативного советского багажа и в большей степени отвечают интересам своих членов. Так, число потребительских кооперативов в период 2006–2013 гг. выросло почти в пять раз. Как успешные, так и неуспешные потребительские кооперативы, как правило, демонстрируют общую черту российской кооперации – сильную зависимость от региональных властей: зачастую они создаются «сверху». Вследствие этого многие из них «дышат на ладан», поскольку региональные власти относятся к ним формально, создавая требуемое количество кооперативов но не особо беспокоясь об их дальнейшей судьбе. Даже если региональные власти заинтересованы в развитии сельской кооперации в качестве механизма поддержки мелких сельхозпроизводителей, то создают лишь специфические организационные структуры – с формальным членством, отсутствием материальной ответственности рядовых членов и решением всех вопросов руководством с помощью местной администрации, которая предоставляет кооперативам собственную рыночную нишу за счет обеспечения гарантированных каналов сбыта и урегулирования проблем с контрагентами, т.е. кооперативы не способны выживать автономно в условиях конкуренции.

Кредитные кооперативы являются важным источником заемных средств для малых форм хозяйствования на селе, находясь на этом рынке на третьем месте после ОАО «Россельхозбанк» и ОАО «Сбербанк России». После 2011 г. развитие СКПК существенно замедлилось: одним из ключевых барьеров для их развития

является отсутствие стабильного и постоянного источника кредитных ресурсов. Успешность деятельности СКПК в большинстве случаев зависит (при прочих равных условиях) от пополнения фонда финансовой взаимопомощи, в том числе за счет внешних заимствований, но источники и возможности для их привлечения у кооперативов крайне ограничены.

Огромные региональные различия внутри страны не позволяют однозначно выделить какой-либо единый общероссийский вектор в развитии кооперации. Тем не менее можно выделить две ключевые черты нынешней российской кооперативной модели. Во-первых, ни о какой идеологической подоплеке кооперативного движения сегодня говорить не приходится: кооперация мыслится в чисто утилитарном ключе. Во-вторых, государство было, есть и в обозримой перспективе останется одним из важнейших факторов развития кооперации.

Несмотря на свою длительную историю, кооперативный сектор в России все еще (или вновь) находится на стадии формирования, что обусловлено целым рядом трудностей:

- 1) сложным и противоречивым советским наследием, в т.ч. негативным стереотипным восприятием кооперации;
- 2) отсутствием кооперативного движения «снизу»: рыночные реформы 1990-х гг. и обусловленное ими снижение уровня жизни населения не породили бум самоорганизации общества в ответ на экономические трудности;
- 3) идеологическим приматом и экономическим доминированием крупного производства;
- 4) неудовлетворительным состоянием академических исследований кооперации.

Ключевые слова: кооперация, сельскохозяйственные кооперативы, развитие кооперации, сельская Россия, экономическая теория кооперации

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