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Theories of Collective Action in Agriculture and Former Soviet Union

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Benefits of Collective Action in Agriculture

- access to formerly prohibitively expensive machinery or inputs
- stronger bargaining power in negotiating with the middle-men (market power)
- access markets and extension services
- coordination of water use and drainage among upstream and downstream farmers
- coordination of activities to prepare for floods, soil erosion, and climate change
- collective social identity, social security nets

Premises of research

- Theoretical – an extreme diversity of theories and approaches seeking to explain collective action around natural resource management
- Secondary data -- a variegated context, policies and collective action in agriculture in the Former Soviet Union with textured landscape of collective action
- New indigenous forms of cooperation not corresponding to the Western notions of “cooperatives” and warranting research

Five schools of thoughts and FSU

- Economic theory of transaction costs (economy of scale)
 - Small farm size – more cooperation (not observed)
 - More incentives – more cooperation
- Common pool resources and SES (Ostrom's school)
 - Scarcity and degradation forces to cooperate (to be researched)
- Social capital and social identity theory (identity and trust)
 - Could play a role, but requires sociological and ethnographic research
- Multi-level governance theory (layered institutions)
 - More intervening state creates less social capital (not observed)
- Globalization theories (narratives and discourses)
 - Donors and “neo-liberal institutions” create atomization, or push for dysfunctional forms of cooperatives

Research Design and Methods

- Farmer survey was carried out in 2015 in Armenia (400), Kazakhstan (200), Russia (600) and Uzbekistan (400)
- Both formal and informal cooperation has been asked in the questionnaires
- The “demand” side of cooperation is of concern here, not the “supply” side as common in research (e.g. Lerman and Sedik, 2014)
- Theories are reviewed to see if results may fit the empirical data

Background and data

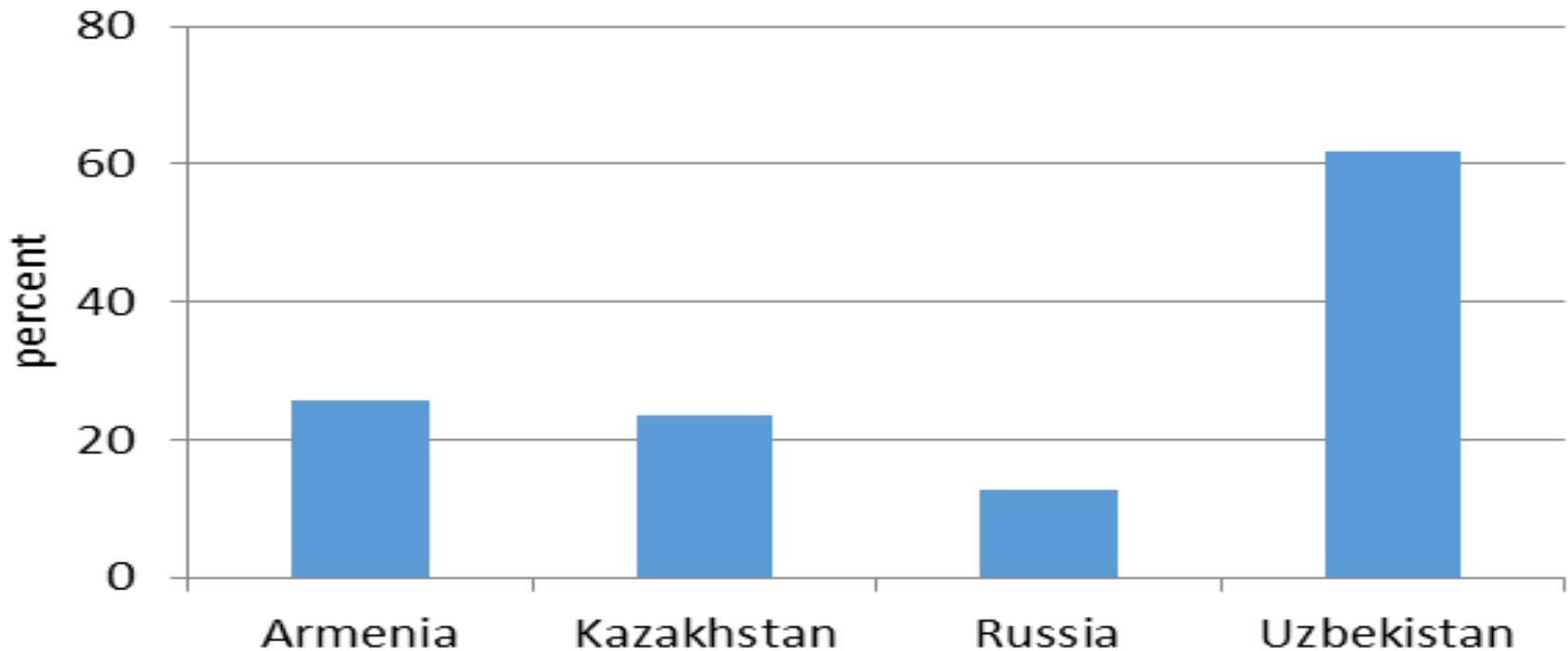


Figure 2 Participation of farm in cooperative activities -- 2015

Gardner and Lerman (2006) refer to WB surveys (1994-2000) which states the following figures

Armenia – 44

Kazakhstan – no data

Russia – 74

Uzbekistan – no data

Provisional conclusions

- The review of theories shows that all of them have been applied to FSU, with perhaps *economic theory* and *multi-level governance* leading the way; This may be the result of the domination of the discussion by economics as a discipline
- It seems no theory can account for the diversity in approaches in the region (subject for future research), and a more open-ended, contextual approach is needed here – the one that emerges from the fieldwork
- From empirical research (primary data) no patterns transpire and research puzzles come forth for a more in-depth research (see next slide)
- From secondary data on cooperatives, many variables are suggested as to having an impact on collective action, but few rigorous empirical studies have been done to either experimentally prove any of those points, or provide a thick, ethnographically sensitive accounts of how cooperation happens, why it happens, and what may facilitate it

Future research avenues

- **Positivistic methodologies**

- Relationship between state institutions/intervention and collective action
- Relationship between farm size and collective action
- Relationship between formal and informal cooperation
- Relationship between awareness of farmers about the more complex forms of cooperation and action (demand for collective action)
- Relationship between extension work and farmer collective action

- **Interpretivist methodologies**

- Understanding how the indigenous notions of “cooperation” emerge, why and in what kind of a “thick” context
- Case Study research

Thank You for Your Attention!

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