

CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COOPERATION IN HIERARCHICAL ENVIRONMENTS

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The article analyses cultural and institutional basics of origin, development and stagnation of cooperative systems in hierarchical environment. Basics and Principles of interaction of hierarchical and cooperative (self-organizing) systems in the period of transition economy are considered on the historical material and research material in the regions of the RF. It is proved that cooperative systems can be time-resistant in two cases: if the resources concentration is low or if the systems are within socio-economic policy which resists mergers and take overs.

Keywords: social dynamics, cooperation, competition, hierarchy, natural hierarchy, cooperative management, economic policy, institutional environment.

INTRODUCTION

It is known that successful corporate strategies are the source of social development because they facilitate the expansion of the trust radius, the strengthening of horizontal connections, the development and consolidation of the game rules, which are based on the cooperative decision-making and the distribution of powers and responsibility. However, in hierarchic environments, cooperation gains specific forms, which define the characteristics of social and cultural dynamics to a significant extent. The dominance of hierarchic structures and blockage of horizontal connections leads to a distorted world-view, distrust, apathy, dissociation of social groups, disruption of control functions (feedback) and, as a consequence, to the high level of corruption, ineffective management, inertness of social-economic system and their dependence from the trajectory of the previous development.

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to reveal the specifics of the origin and development of cooperative systems in hierarchically organized societies in 2005-2013, the authors conducted the experiments and measurements with the research projects of the Institute of Regional Economics and Social Design (IRESD) (Grushevskiy, 2008). During the trainings for the employees of business-structures and non-profit organizations, which were conducted in various regions, the groups of Western Europeans and Russians were presented with the same tasks that required cooperative decision-making (which is one of the types of cooperative interaction). As a result, we revealed a robust pattern: Russian citizens spent significantly less time on the decision-making than

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Europeans. During the observations of the groups, we revealed two essentially different models of decision-making.

The first model is common for the European groups. At first, they gave each participant an opportunity to speak, then they discussed until all of the emerged questions and objections were resolved. As a result, the decision was made unanimously with consideration of the opinions, corrections and specifications of each member of the group (in rare cases, by the majority).

The second model is common for the groups of Russian participants. Usually, they studied each other for 10-15 minutes until they found a person, who proposed a decision. At that moment the group announced that they were ready. In this case the process of group interaction included the revelation of a leader, who is capable of making a decision and taking responsibility, and then the transition of the responsibility from the group to a leader. Moreover, as demonstrated in practice, a decision made this way is usually formal and can be reviewed upon a change of the leader. In case of a mistake the leader can be displaced by the group, or he can stand aside from the job by his own will. During the studies, we did not reveal the cases where a group that acted in present logic admitted a cooperative mistake and took responsibility for the made decision or for the choice of a wrong person as a leader.

Further comparison of the two abovementioned models allows making a conclusion that the robustness of a social system (including economics) is defined by the participants' ability to produce, accept and execute a cooperative decision. In turn, a decision can be cooperative and be described as a vector sum in the static paradigm or as equilibrium, according to Nash (1951), or non-cooperative, which can be described as a model of "principal-agent" relationships with delegation of responsibility and powers.

In present work we make an assumption that only cooperative decisions, which are made in the process of resolving the controversies in the opinions and interests, transfer to the rank of robust practices. Game rules that were cooperatively produced are broken less frequently than the ones that have a certain person of institution responsible. In the systems, which work in the logic of the first model, unpredictability of the vector of idea's or system's development approaches the minimum (MacKenzie, Wajcman, 1999). Therefore, the density and robustness of the institutional environment increases and the trust radius expands (people are more prone to trust the subjects, whose behavior is more predictable).

The same conclusions about the predictability of social-economic systems, which established as balanced from the perspective of various group interests, are made by A. Pshevorskiy (1993), which correlates with the most common definition of democracy in the present political science: unpredictability of the result with the transparency of structures.

RESULTS

In our case, the interest focuses on the logic of development of the cooperative systems of the second model, which is closer to the description of Russian reality. Its analysis allowed proposing a hypothesis about the relation of cooperation development vectors, which unfold on a micro-level, with the system of macro-integration of the Russian society (Bolshakova *et al.*, 2015). According to this hypothesis, on the different stages of the Russian history, social integration was based on the self-similarity of axiological and organizational structures, which belong to the different levels of the society. In other words, it can be said that Russian society was structured like a fractal: stereotyped integrative elements were built in each other like the structure of Russian matryoshka – micro-structures adapt to the perception, which is defined by the axiological constructs of the macro-level, and in some cases, vice versa. The back side of such “fractal” order is the discontinuity related to the disruption of horizontal communications between such elements of the same level (Gorin, 2011). Continuity and integrity of such order has been reached mainly by horizontal, and not vertical, connections. Because of this, vertical powerful influence integrated all levels of interactions, including the level of local cooperation, which is the basis of the whole structure.

For example, in the Medieval Russia the local forms of social integration, such as domain properties, became a certain prototype for understanding the elements of a larger scale of social structure. The domains system was a simple joining of the domains (“patrimonies”), thus replicating the “family model” of a father’s rule on larger and larger scale, including the symbolic reasoning of the highest power structure (“father of fathers”, “tsar of tsars”). Therefore, in Russia the state was initially built on the basis of identity with local patriarchal images. One of the lines of the development of the “patrimony” concept, demonstrated by M.V. Ilyin, presents in its exchange for the concepts of “fatherland” and “homeland” from the XV-XVI centuries; these concepts gain a high and abstract sense, saving the connection to the tradition of local paternalism (Ilyin, 1996).

Up to the beginning of the XX century, local groups of peasants and city inhabitants (including professional or territorial groups) remained dissociated, and there were almost no opportunities for their wider integration in order to rationalize common interests (social-class, professional, territorial, etc.). Sh. Eisenstadt explains this trait of Russian society by the established way of central government’s intrusion to the periphery (Eisenstadt, 1999). He writes: “The main mechanism, through which the center reached its goals, was forced dissociation between politically powerful elites, which were also the carriers of cultural order, especially in its political aspects, various institutional elites and ideologists of the models of non-political cultural order, on one side, and, on the other side, economic and educational elites and presenters of solidarity of the main ascriptive groups” (Inozemtsev, 2006). As a result, separate groups’ abilities to exchange various type of resources were

blocked. Each local group, therefore, remained isolated and was built in the vertical pole of social integration, thus replicating the local-cell structure of a hierarchical society. This pole was built upon non-conventional principles of domination-conformity (which are common for the “principal-agent” relationships model) (Poster, 2000).

Russia’s trait also consists of the fact that, along the society’s historical development, such “fractal” structure changed, restructured but preserved the fundamental characteristics. During the Stalin period, which was the peak of forced industrialization and urbanization, the government presented itself on the basis of reconstructed patriarchal-paternalistic community model, which was expanded to the scale of the whole country. This model lost its adequacy upon the decrease of the role of the generation of peasant, who moved to the cities; and in the post-war period its was transformed into a new “fractal” model, which replicated the distinctive Soviet “collectivism”. The Soviet “collectivism” model was also based on the large-scale symmetry of the primary groups, which were unified in larger ones, repeating such traits on different levels of social hierarchy up to the macro-integration of the “big society”. Branched system of social-political communication ran through the whole society, integrating in each local group with the “capillaries” of the power hierarchy influence. Almost all able citizens were attached to local groups, through which the main connections to the society were actualized. Because of this, a Soviet person was interested in maintaining the agreement with the collective norms of life. Creation of significant social-political connections outside these structures was almost impossible. This circumstance largely explains the absence of organized opposing forces outside the system (except for the cultural underground and a few illegal political organizations, on the one hand, and shadow clans, on the other hand).

Russian society of the beginning of the XXI century shows the traits of a new “fractal” structure, which is used to consolidate the social matter by the well-proved way of hierarchic construction of self-similar structures on different levels of social integration (Giddens, 2003). The new form of such “fractal” becomes corporation. In the conditions of governmental “clan capitalism” there is characteristic transition of the corporate management principles to the field of state government, while the state’s capabilities are used by the largest Russian corporations in order to provide monopolistic position on the market (Inozemtsev, 2006). Furthermore, blocking the horizontal connections during cooperation is a significant factor of the establishing corporative “fractal” structure on its different levels and in different social fields (Bourdieu, 2005). Political monopoly in state management is completed by the high concentration of assets in Russian corporation. Almost 70% of them has a stock holder, who owns over a half of the shares (moreover, in almost half of Russian corporations there is no opponent for the large proprietary in the face of the holder of a blocking share). Only in 13% of corporations, the level of assets

concentration remains low and the blocking share has not been developed (Dolgopyatova *et al.*, 2007).

DISCUSSION

The specific trait of Russian cooperative systems is explained by institutional factors, rather than by the cultural ones. The decisions and game rules, significant for the country, were not the subject of public discussions and open agreement of interests of the groups, institutions and newsmakers, who act in the political and social-economic space. Because of this, the nature of cooperative behavior on the local level is defined by the need to adapt to the “general line” of the country’s government. This also explains the fact that many Russian political parties and non-profit organization are still being created not upon common interests or ideology, shared by the participants, but upon the principle of uniting around a leader.

Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is able to explain the stagnation of cooperative systems in the Russian society. In the conditions of the “manual management” mode of the weak institutional environment and non-transparent and changing game rules, cooperative systems inevitable evolve from self-organization to the organization described by the law of hierarchic compensations, which, in the words of A.P. Nazaretyan, sounds the following way: in a complex hierarchically organized system, the increase of variability on the top level of the system is provided by the variability limitations on the previous levels; and vice versa, the variability increase on the bottom level destroys the top level of organization (Nazaretyan, 2004). The main conclusion is that, as a result of managing sub-system complication, manageability and operational efficiency of the system increases and adaptability decreases. The opposite is also true.

As an alternative, it is possible to propose a paradigm, in which cooperative systems do not adapt for the governmental hierarchy but create such hierarchy in the self-organization process. This paradigm is presented with the highest logic in the works of R. Neph and K. Wilber (Neph, 2002; Wilber, 2007).

The main concept of K. Wilber’s paradigm is holon – something that is a self-sufficient whole and, at the same time, a part of a more complex whole (Koestler, 1969). The natural hierarchy, which was created not upon directions but as a result of system’s complication in the process of non-violent self-organization of holons, is called “holarchy” by K. Wilber. In case of Russia, potential “holons” are first being dissociated and then integrated under the influence of an external impulse (vertical integration). Moreover, horizontal connections almost do not emerge. The weakness of horizontal connections, including the ones that were created by the complementarity principle, is the main trait of modern Russian political and social-economic systems.

This statement is confirmed by multiple facts of Russian political and economic life. As an example, we will analyze the evolution of consumers' credit cooperation. Quantitative growth of consumers' credit cooperatives of the citizens (CCCC) peaked in 1999. The two crises acted as its predispositions: the first one was the crisis of citizens' trust towards the centralized bank system and the state, and the second one the crisis of banks' trust in the citizens – potential credit-takers. Further history of credit cooperation in Russia was not very different from the global one: the fight of the most radical investors for independence from the systems, which they are not able to control. The problem was solved by integration of people and their assets on the basis of the trust principle, which excluded the asymmetry of information – the main principle of classical cooperation. As a result, local civil societies were created in the system of centralized economy and rough bank policy (Day of independence, 2004). From 1998 to 2000 the number of CCCC shareholders in Russia increased by eight times, and the amount of the provided credits – by six times (Grushevskiy, 2010). Further decline of CCCC business activity is related to three factors: increased control from the government, common for Russian practice; cancellation of such barrier as maximal number of shareholders (the process of take-overs was started); enlargement of groups, which was accompanied by the abandonment of classical cooperation and shareholders' transition of powers to a small group of managers, which predefined the growth of information asymmetry and responsibility.

In 2011 classical credit cooperation, which can be described in the K. Wilberg's paradigm of natural hierarchies, was essentially destroyed as a result of passing of the Federal law of the Russian Federation of 2nd of June 2010 # 151-FZ "On micro-financial activity and micro-financial organizations".

Classical cooperation can exist and develop only in the institutional environment of an arbitrator, who performs powerful anti-monopolistic and tax policy, which supports a high level of economic variability that prevents mergers and take-overs. For example, due to this policy in Scandinavian countries, agricultural cooperation took the leading position in the field of manufacture and sale of food. In case of credit cooperation, shareholders, who make decisions independently, are in reflection with CCCC, which also makes decisions independently. Higher-level freedom of actions is defined by the frames that are defined by the lower level. In case of a reversed process, cooperative principle is replaced by the hierarchic one.

Until 2011 micro-financing in Russia, which was typically organized in form of CCCC, was prone to innovations, created new financial tools and experimented with technologies that were common abroad but not unavailable in the country. For example, in the credit cooperation segment the programs of auto lending were developed two years earlier than in the segment of retail bank credits, mortgages were developed three years prior, and CCCC were over 5 years ahead of the banks

in mass granting of retail consumer loans (credits) in the vending spots. Before the passing of the Federal law “On micro-financial activity and micro-financial organizations”, micro-financial and bank segments existed in non-intersecting market fields. Micro-financial organizations (MFO), which mostly were of cooperative nature, sometimes placed temporarily free assets in the bank sector; banks, in turn, through crediting MFO entered the sector of retail customer crediting.

With the passing of the abovementioned Law, the process of funding micro-financial organizations and their transformation into banks and other licensed financial organizations became possible, as well as the opposite process of transforming banks, which do not meet the requirements of the national regulator, into MFO, including crediting CCCC. As a result, local CCCC and rural consumer cooperatives (RCC) left the market or became regional operators of the federal network MFO, which have non-cooperative nature. For example, in Volgograd region by 31st of January 2008 76.4% of the micro-financial services market belonged to CCCC and RCC, while by 31st of January 2012 it was only 18.4%. Classical pattern of activity of credit institutions (deposit - credit) is not relevant in the micro-financial sector anymore. The majority of regional MFO credit the households by the loaned assets of non-regional origin.

As a result, micro-financial services markets in Russia experienced a structural shift: the majority of MFO lost operational independence, capacity and ability to attract shares and investments of the private persons, thus essentially becoming credit agents of the selling banks and large network MFO. The studied micro-financial organizations presented the abandonment of cooperative management principles. The same processes, which destruct the cooperative nature of small and medium enterprise, take part in all sectors of the Russian economy.

However, while on different stages of Russian history the intrusion of hierarchic management systems into the micro-level and creation of “fractal” axiological and organizational orders allowed integrating the society with relatively no problems, by destructing the classical cooperation and suppressing it to the “shadow” fields, now the effects of such strategies look rather questionably. And this happens not only because in Russian version hierarchic structures are not based on trust and stable game rules but act under control of the externally-defined regulators (which, as stated above, are able to demonstrate successfulness by the criterions of operational efficiency and manageability only in short-term perspective). In a differentiated society with various forms of local sociability, it is difficult to actualize the integrative strategies that are based on unification and subordination of various local structures.

Because of this, the question of the possibility to actualize classical cooperative strategies in modern Russia becomes essential. The experience shows that classical cooperation develops slower but, at the same time, it is more robust and adaptive in long-term perspective due to a relatively stable distribution of ideas,

manufacturing tools, labor and assets. Various forms of self-organization of the local communities were always present in the Russian society, although in a weaker state. Throughout the centuries cooperation was displaced from the fields that concerned the governmental interests to the field of private, non-governmental or even “shadow” relations. Because of this, cooperative strategies often demonstrate their robustness and efficiency in these fields. For example, in the Soviet society (especially in the last period of its existence) actively growing “shadow” spaces were based on rather complex cooperative effects (“networking”, “black market”, etc.). Expansion of such “shadow” spaces was an inevitable answer to the inability of governmental hierarchy to regulate the complicating social relationships (Ilyin, 1997).

At the same time, the studies conducted by the authors in Russian regions show that the process is reflective: the urge of political and economic players to maximize the control correspond with the people’s readiness to transfer the responsibility and powers to the higher levels. Deep interviews with the managers of MF-os that lost independence, non-governmental retirement funds, small and medium banks and insurance companies show that they hoped for the expansion of opportunities without the loss of the gained income. This demonstrates the weakness of Russian culture of immunity, which is able to limit the practices of take-overs, mergers and expansion of the control from the top (Russian corporations, 2007).

In order to assess the development perspectives of cooperative strategies, we present the result of our study of the logic of group decision-making, which we obtained in 2005-2013 in a number of Russian regions. These results show that the gap in the decision-making time between Europeans and Russian was always present but, nevertheless, some abnormal regions were revealed (see the table 1).

TABLE 1: TIME SPENT ON PRODUCING A GROUP DECISION IN DIFFERENT REGIONS OF RUSSIA

<i>Region/ City</i>	<i>Saint- Peters- burg</i>	<i>Mos- cow</i>	<i>Novosi- birsk</i>	<i>Che- chen Repu- blic</i>	<i>Dage- stan</i>	<i>Rostov- on- Don</i>	<i>Kabar- dino- Balkar Republic</i>	<i>Krasno- dar Krai</i>	<i>Stav- ropol Krai</i>	<i>Average in Europe</i>	<i>Average in the RF</i>
<i>%</i>	67	23	47	41	43	24	38	26	23	100	16

Note: 100% is the average time of collective decision-making by the groups of participants from the European countries (the measurements were taken in the countries of the Northern part of Western Europe: Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland).

We would like to comment on several revealed differences in the population abilities to cooperate.

Saint-Petersburg was initially developed as a city, where institutions of collective and decentralized decision-making played a significant part. The catalyst

of the process were the expatriate communities of European settlers, as well as Russian students and merchants that copy the European practices. In the modern period its geographical proximity to Europe also plays a part by facilitating the diffusion of European stereotypes and practices.

Moscow (at least the strata of capital intellectuals) in the Russian Empire strived to copy the lifestyle, common for the North capital, by opposing it to the Old-Moscow practice of Eastern tyranny, while the city was developed not as a place of lifestyle for free craftsmen but as a tax center. Moreover, modern Moscow is a settlers' community, which integrated the most active and risk-prone migrants that have to agree because of close mentality and origin.

Novosibirsk represents typical settlers' culture (equal, in certain sense, to the cultures of USA, Australia, Singapore), which was constructed from exiled and convicted for criminal offence and Soviet intelligentsia. Their life experience, scornful attitude towards official hierarchic systems, as well as natural and climate conditions created an environment that is tolerant to variability and cooperation.

Chechen Republic has multi-century tape structure, which combines mono-national culture with variety of managerial and cultural practices, which facilitates the agreement of interests and creation of common rules. At the same time, recently the Republic loses the abilities of cooperative decision-making and gains the practices of Eastern tyranny, which are not common for Nakh peoples. In 2005-2008 the provided characteristic was 69% and was the highest in Russia (in 2013 it was already 41%).

Dagestan is a typical multi-national culture, which resembles, for example, the Swiss. In order to characterize the integrations of rural communities of semi-patriarchal and semi-feudal type in Dagestan, historians, ethnographic scientists, and later, sociologists use the concept of "free communities of Dagestan". These are clan-tribal integrations of Avars, Dargins, Lezgians and other peoples that maintained independence from the neighboring feudal proprietaries. The largest of them were Salatau, Gumbet, Andia, Dargo and others. The main role in economic and political life of the society belonged to djaamat – the social gathering. In the period of Caucasus war in 1830-50 free communities were the main core of Imamah. After the defeat of Shamil's movement, they were formally destroyed but de-facto the practices of local self-management survived the Soviet period and were preserved until the present time in a modified form.

Kabardino-Balkar Republic is a multi-national space with traditions that are close to free communities of Dagestan.

In general, the decision-making logic in the republics of Russian Caucasus was more correspondent to the cooperative model, up to the deep islamification of the last years, which can be described as a process of structuring of the social-economic space under the influence of a strong external impulse.

The decision-making mechanism in Rostov region, Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai was developed under the influence from the culture of runaway peasant serfs (later – Cossacks), which combined the practice of cooperative decision with the practice of submission. The catalyst of cooperative processes in the region became the settlers' communities of Germans and Italians, who were invited by Catherine the Great for exploration of the Southern lands.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, the results of the studies allow making the following conclusions:

- Predisposition towards cooperation is defined by economic viability, as well as by the culture of the inhabitants of a specific territory;
- Cultural bases of decision-making are not static; they change under the influence of economic practices;
- Development and stagnation of cooperative systems are predefined by the ability or inability of economically-active citizens to make cooperative decisions, which is defined by the culture and regional traditions and institutional matrix, which reflects the stability and autonomy of the game rules;
- Cooperative systems are viable in the conditions of relatively low (distributed) concentrated of resources, income and property, or in the conditions of anti-monopolistic and tax policies, which prevent take-overs;
- Robust development of cooperative systems is possible under the condition that their system-generating elements would still be business-structures, which were established and are controlled not by external subjects (stockholders, lenders and investors), but by local groups of citizens, which would increase the adaptability of cooperative systems to regional conditions and would provide the necessary variability of organizational-legal forms, technologies and entrepreneurial practices;
- Modern Russian law facilitates incomes and property concentration, during which principles of self-organization transition to principles of hierarchic organization; shrinkage of the cooperative sector decreases the adaptability of social (economic) systems towards the changes of external environment, which, in particular, leads to social and economic stagnation.

Therefore, the characteristics of cooperation development in Russia are explained mainly by the cooperation subjects' need to adapt to those power technologies, which are used by the governmental hierarchy for organizing the management systems based on the influence from external influences, rather than on mental characteristics and cultural inertia. This leads to the cooperation dislocation from the fields that concern the key interests of public and social-

economic life of the regions and local communities with the aim of maximizing the rent by the capital and global elites.

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