

## **The future of agricultural cooperatives in Russia: Does theory matter?**

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*Abstract.* The article aims at identifying theoretical and practical reasons for the failure of the agricultural cooperation development in Russia. Authors suggest that rural cooperatives in Russia do not develop due to the general features of the formation of social capital in the Russian countryside, the lack of necessary institutional conditions, and the wrong idea that cooperatives based on the classical principles of cooperation can operate successfully in the contemporary economy and society. The first theoretical barrier to cooperation is that in the contemporary high-technology agriculture, hybrid structures (cooperatives) are less efficient than the hierarchical one used by agroholdings. The second theoretical barrier is the inconsistency of seven classical principles of cooperation formulated at the time of Raiffeisen (i.e. outdated) with today's economic realities and their transformations. The third practical barrier is the rapid degradation of rural areas and the low level of trust and interaction between members of agricultural cooperatives, which is why there are no trends of the bottom-up development of cooperation. The authors conclude that a high level of social capital is the necessary condition for cooperation: at the formation stage, this level is high due to interpersonal relationships developed from the informal social interactions of its members and a high level of trust among members and between members and management, but cooperatives start to lose their social capital as they enlarge — the sense of community, trust and mutual assistance disappears, the atmosphere becomes more business-oriented.

*Key words:* cooperation, agricultural cooperatives, classical principles of cooperation, agroholdings, social capital, trust, rural development, rural areas

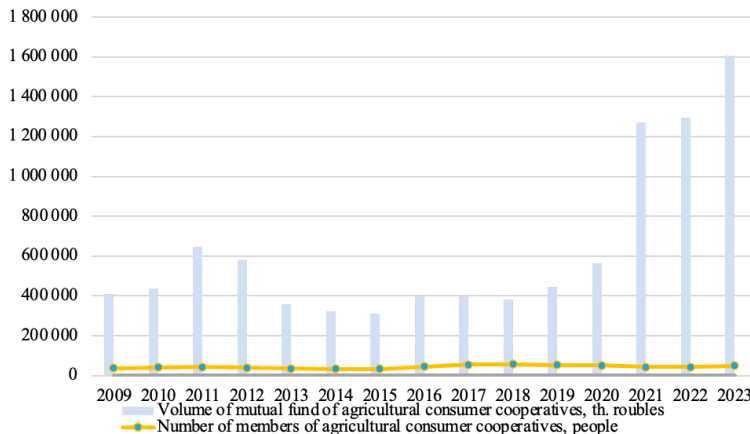
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Food systems all over the world have radically changed in the last twenty years. A sign of our time is the rapid development of global value chains (GVC) in agricultural production, marketing, and consumption, which currently account for 50% of the world food trade. Value chains have become longer and technologically more advanced, using smart and complex technologies and solutions. Russia's GVC participation index remains relatively low: it was about 10% in 2016, which is far below Hungary with 40%). Large players fit more easily than the small ones into global agricultural value chains. Small

farms have substantially greater difficulties in access to financing, resources, services, and markets. Agricultural cooperatives could play a significant role in the market integration of small farms, but there is not much readiness to cooperate in the former Soviet republics. Given the lack of an adequate legal base and insufficient public awareness of the cooperative movement, only 1.5% of agricultural produce of the largest CIS countries are sold through cooperatives.

According to the 2016 Agricultural Census, Russia has 174,600 peasant farms and individual entrepreneurs and 23 million household-plot operators. Of this enormous number, only about 80,000 are members of marketing, supply, processing or other service cooperatives. Their number has fluctuated around 3,000 annually in the last decade, the number of their members reached about 50,000 in 2023. Cooperative's mean lifetime is four years. Cooperatives have developed vigorously since 2015 in response to government grants for the cooperative development. In total, there were 880 such grants for 11.7 billion rubles (158 million US dollars) (Fig. 1). However, these grants must be used within five years or returned to the state, but after this period many cooperatives transform into other organizational forms due to a limited liability company under sole management is more manageable than a cooperative under collective management.

Fig. 1. Russian cooperation's funding and scale



What constrains the development of agricultural cooperation in Russia? The gap between the potential for cooperation and its realization (Yanbykh, Saraikin, Lerman, 2019) raises questions about creation and development of cooperatives and more general issues of rural development. Activities of agricultural service cooperatives (“consumer cooperatives” in Russian legal

terminology) and reasons for their inefficiency have been widely examined (Sobolev, 2017; Antonova, 2018; Golovina, Smirnova, 2020; Yanbykh, Saraikin, Lerman, 2019). We believe that there are three main reasons for the failure of the cooperative form of integration among small producers in Russia: two reasons are theoretical, the third one — practical.

The first theoretical barrier is attributed to the cooperatives' hybrid transaction structure: *in today's high-technology agriculture, hybrid structure is less efficient than the hierarchical one* used by Russian agroholdings (Uzun, Shagaida, Lerman, 2021). Coase (1995) and Williamson (1996) argue that transaction costs can be controlled only in three ways: a strict hierarchy (in agroholdings, corporations), the free market, and cooperatives as an intermediate, hybrid form on this scale (Menard, 2006), which provides space for member transactions, while these members are fully independent in their decision-making. Strengths and weaknesses of cooperatives as a hybrid mode of transaction management have been highlighted by numerous research (Bijman, Muradian, Cechin, 2011; Hernandez-Espallardo, Arcas-Lario, Marcos, 2013; Kalyagin, 2016; Kotlyarov, 2016).

Ivan Emelianoff (1995: 250–251), the forgotten Russian-American author of the economic theory of cooperation, noted that “the widely employed efforts to classify and interpret cooperatives by their external traits (capital-stock companies versus no-capital stock associations, Rochdale type versus non-profit pattern, the patronage principle versus non-patronage practices, equal voting versus no-equal voting rule, etc.) are a priori hopeless: the variability of the external characteristics of cooperative aggregates is kaleidoscopic and infinite”. Emelianoff was the first to call cooperative organization “a collection (aggregate) of economic units, which distinguishes a cooperative from a company. The cooperative differs in nature from the investor-owned firm not only in that it is a union of persons, and the firm is a union of capital, but also in that the firm, as an economic unit, has its own life, and the cooperative lives the lives of its constituent units (members)”.

Emelianoff's concept of “aggregate” is close to Menard's “hybrid” (2013: 939): “Hybrids are ‘institutional structures of production’ with characteristics of their own. They resort to specific governing devices developed to deal with: (1) property rights that ultimately remain distinct, although significant assets are pooled; (2) decision rights that keep partners independent, although shared rights restrict their autonomy; and (3) the need to design adequate incentives in a context in which frontiers among residual claimants are blurred. Hybrids proliferate because advantages of coordination and cooperation overcome gains associated with market competition, while remaining autonomous

provides more flexibility and better incentives than an integrated structure can offer”.

Numerous studies suggest that the architecture of hybrid organizations is different from markets or hierarchies, and each hybrid organization has its own combination of autonomy and coordination. At the end of the scale, close to market coordination, hybrids rely on trust among members — decisions are decentralized, and free coordination works through mutual influence and close cooperation. At the opposite end, decision-making is close to a rigid hierarchy. Bijman, Muradyan, and Chechin (2011) argued that democratic coordination is possible only in cooperatives with homogeneous membership: when its structure is heterogeneous, hierarchical management is needed. Since hierarchy is opposite to democracy, it is difficult to reconcile interests and actions of all cooperative members, and the very existence of the cooperative is jeopardized. The authors call the search for a compromise in managing cooperatives the “hierarchy dilemma”. Thus, given the social-economic homogeneity of cooperative members, it is relatively easy to coordinate their positions democratically. On the other hand, successful integration of the cooperative as an organization into value chains requires a business plan, internal rules, and control, which are hierarchical administrative measures.

Democratic governance persists, because the relative ease of coordinating members’ activities reduces transaction costs of sharing information and helps to compensate for members’ opportunistic behavior. On the other hand, to reach a winning negotiating position with monopsonistic structures (processing, retail networks), organization requires strict vertical/hierarchical coordination of small management units. Bijman et al. (2011) suggest that in agricultural cooperatives, a higher level of vertical coordination can be achieved only by reducing member inclusion, i.e., by excluding some members from decision-making to attract investment and maintain a hierarchical type of management.

At the same time, cooperatives have an advantage of greater flexibility in decision-making compared to other institutional and legal forms, based on the close interaction of members who live in the same neighborhood and are familiar with each other’s problems. Moreover, member relationships depend on informal rules and norms that develop over time without any additional costs. “Community governance” (Bowles, Gintis, 2002) can resolve the violation of agreements and develop a system of penalties for free ridership and opportunism. In addition, trust as a fundamental foundation of social capital reduces the cost of coordination both at the stage of information exchange and at the stage of contract execution. Thus, although cooperatives are or-

*R. G. Yanbykh,*

*Z. Lerman*

The future of agricultural cooperatives in Russia: Does theory matter?

ganized primarily for economic purposes, the social element of collaboration and solidarity should not be underestimated.

When is it beneficial for farmers to unite in a cooperative? Kalyagin (2016) argues that “a cooperative association of people with specific assets is possible if, first, benefit of such an association is inclusive, and second, the expected net benefits of each member associated with participation in such an association exceed all alternative expected net benefits”. Unfortunately, trust between members of agricultural cooperatives in Russia is very low (Saraikin, Yanbykh, 2018; Golovina et al., 2020; Yanbykh, Saraikin, Lerman, 2019); their cooperative membership is typically not inclusive (the leader is the sole decision-maker, often guided by his own benefit); and above all, net benefits of each cooperative member do not necessarily exceed the expected alternative net benefits. For instance, the pandemic determined new niches and opportunities for smallholders, with direct supply chains from farmers to consumers on online platforms. Unification of farmers in cooperatives is also hindered by high transaction costs in agriculture — due to uncertainty and asymmetry of information (since large processors, traders and retailers are opposed by numerous family farms) (FAO, 2020).

During the first thirty years of the transition, researchers and policymakers debated the future of smallholders (Uzun, Shagaida, Lerman, 2021), since agroholdings (under policies providing them with exclusive competitive advantages through subsidies, discretionary credits, and preferential allocation of land) seem to crowd out not only smallholders but also independent agricultural enterprises. Hierarchical structures (agroholdings) have replaced hybrid ones (agricultural cooperatives). Chances of weak cooperatives to “outplay” large, well-organized and state-supported agricultural holdings are very small. Agricultural holdings have become widespread in Russia as an antithesis to cooperatives, and they have become much more successful (Uzun, Shagaida, Lerman, 2021).

The second theoretical reason for the failure of cooperation is typical not only for Russia — *the inconsistency of classical principles of cooperation with today's economic realities and their transformation*. The main question is what makes an enterprise a cooperative, and where is the dividing line between cooperatives and other legal forms. Often an enterprise is called a cooperative but does not act according to the principles of genuine cooperation. For example, cooperative income can be distributed in proportion to capital and with voting. Guardians of the “cooperative idea” will unequivocally name such enterprises joint-stock companies. However, cooperators are in no hurry to abandon the cooperative label, appealing to a cooperative spirit in their organization. What appears on the surface as non-cooperative in-

come distribution is simply an adaptation to contemporary realities needed to attract new capital.

Seven classical principles of cooperation were formulated by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) in 1995<sup>1</sup>:

1. Voluntary and open membership: cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all willing to use their services and to accept responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.
2. Democratic member control: cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who participate in developing policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives must report to members. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member — one vote); other cooperatives are also democratically organized.
3. Member economic participation: members contribute equally to the capital of their cooperative, and at least part of that capital is usually common property. As a rule, members receive limited compensation, if any, on capital as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all purposes: to develop cooperative, possibly by making reserves, part of which would be indivisible; to benefit members in proportion to their transactions; and to support other activities approved by the membership.
4. Autonomy and independence: cooperatives are autonomous self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they make agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.
5. Education, training, and information: cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of cooperatives and inform the general public (in particular the youth and opinion leaders) about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

*R. G. Yanbykh,  
Z. Lerman*

The future of agricultural cooperatives in Russia: Does theory matter?

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1. See: URL: <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>. The ICA principles, in turn, are based on cooperative principles formulated by Rochdale Pioneers, founders of the first cooperative in 1844. Seven ICA principles are often mentioned on the websites of cooperatives to prove their relevance in the contemporary environment. See, for example, the San Luis Valley Electric Rural Co-op (<https://www.alamosachamber.com/slv-rural-electric-coop>) or the Peninsula Light Company (<https://www.penlight.org/about/the-seven-cooperative-principles>) as representative of the major sector of cooperative power utilities.

6. Cooperation of cooperatives: cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, regional, national, and international structures.
7. Concern for community: cooperatives aim at the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

These principles were formulated at the time of Raiffeisen, but today classical cooperative principles come into conflict with interests of uniting economic units. Depending on the legally provided options in each country, farmer-members can choose among different models of management the one that best meets their needs (Bijman et al, 2016). These models differ in the use of supervisory boards and membership councils (in addition to the General Assembly), separation of association and firm, use of professional management, participation of external experts, non-member trade and voting principles. Some of the (innovative) ownership structures are hybrids with different organizational arrangements like a cooperative association owning an IOF-like business, producer organizations that jointly own a cooperative, firms owned by farmers' organizations or cooperatives being majority owner of an IOF that is also listed at the stock exchange. The question is what principles can be considered canonical, and what enterprises can be called genuine cooperatives.

Already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, classics of the theory of cooperation noted the contradiction between definitions of cooperation as a social movement and an economic organization. According to Chayanov (1993), "the concept of cooperation should be divided into two parts: a cooperative enterprise and a cooperative movement and defining features should be identified for both". Chayanov noted that when interviewing cooperators of that time (Russian, Italian, Belgian, German), he learned "very contradictory indications of the features that constitute the essence of the cooperative movement". Chayanov (1993) identified six of them:

1. the nature of voluntary membership, its independence and democratic rule;
2. how profits are distributed, and the role of capital (ways of profit distribution can vary, but the service role of capital means that its growth is more important for the farm than for the cooperative);
3. open nature of cooperative organizations;
4. labor character — non-labor elements and wage labor are prohibited (this refers exclusively to the production cooperation — collective farms);
5. (political principle) the essence of cooperation is not in its organizational forms but in its social goals (struggle for the poor in the socialist or clerical case);

6. partial generalization of economic activities rather than combination of all collective efforts into one collective enterprise (commune).

Emelianoff (1995: 3) described three main approaches to identifying the essence of cooperation: traditional social-reformist, descriptive, and theoretical. The social-reformist interpretation is based on the ideas of R. Owen, C. Fourier and J. S. Mill, which “have been gradually dogmatized into a set of kindergarten truths”, “and the cooperative movement” attracts attention as “an instrument of political activity and propaganda”. Since Emelianoff did not consider the cooperative as a separate enterprise but as an “aggregate of economic units”, he emphasized that “the creation of cooperative aggregates occurs only under the pressure of extreme necessity and their duration as cooperative aggregates depends on unrelenting and effective efforts to continue the methods of activity corresponding to the aggregate nature of the organization, and on the successful pacification of all forces of disagreement (problems of membership relations) within the aggregate... Since destructive centrifugal tendencies operate in all economic units, one of the imperative prerequisites for their stability is the economic homogeneity of their members, which minimizes potential friction and suspicion in the unit itself. This need is as important for the duration of cooperatives as the urgent need for coordinated action is necessary for their creation” (then the principle of “equal voting” becomes clear, because members and proportional participation in activities are also equal). “Thus, the most recognizable cooperative principle of “one member—one vote” is not a dogma, but a simple need to respect the interests of all... The most deceptive principle of equal voting... it contradicts the basic rule of proportionality... however, equal voting is in reality only a special case of proportional voting of economically homogeneous members, and homogeneity of membership is one of the foundations of the stability and vitality of cooperative communities... such equality is a real reality, not a matter of principle” (Emelianoff, 1995: 263).

Researchers have repeatedly confirmed the difficulty of managing a cooperative with heterogeneous membership. With the collective management structure, traditional cooperatives are supposed to face organizational inefficiencies due to the opportunistic behaviors and high collective decision-making costs. However, a high level of social capital compensates for the collective governance structure by controlling and coordinating members’ activities through social mechanisms (Deng, Hendrikse, Liang, 2021).

L. N. Litoshenko also tried to identify the principles of cooperation focusing on the essence of the cooperative enterprise, which “cannot, first of all, be considered as an independent, hav-

*R. G. Yanbykh,*

*Z. Lerman*

The future of agricultural cooperatives in Russia: Does theory matter?



ing its own economic goal. Such goals have only those farms that are united by cooperation and are behind it. THEY are the true owners of the cooperative enterprise, THEIR goals are of independent and self-sufficient importance, while the cooperative enterprise is auxiliary in achieving these goals. This simple truth should be well remembered when discussing income-free or “the special nature of cooperative income”... The auxiliary economy (cooperation) ultimately seeks to increase the income of its members... as a legal entity, profitable or income-free, distributing the benefits received and the savings achieved among members — all these issues are of secondary importance. It is impossible to develop any theory about “features” of cooperatives “on these accounting signs” (Litoshenko, 1995).

Equal voting is the third principle of the International Cooperative Alliance, and the remaining principles apply to other types of enterprises. Is the voluntary and open joining a cooperative also inherent in the creation of any enterprise? Today, it is unlikely that someone is dragged into an enterprise by force. Access to information and training are simply necessary today, and many cooperatives that unite into second-level cooperatives choose not a cooperative but a shareholder form. Charity and targeting the local community are also not limited to cooperatives.

Thus, the classical principles of cooperation are outdated; they have excellent socialist roots but poorly reflect processes in the contemporary society. These principles were formulated at the time when socialism and communism had high hopes, and there were no theories of institutionalism or transactions. Golovina and Smirnova (2020) agree that in the current institutional and social-economic conditions traditional cooperative principles (open membership, unlimited transactions, attractive ideology) do not stimulate the rapid expansion of business and do not provide its participants with competitive advantages. If basic organizational principles of cooperation (as an organizational form) correspond to the market environment, formal and informal institutions, then already at the stage of creation a viable organizational structure emerges — with significant motivation, ample opportunities for healthy competition, rational interaction with counterparties and partners; otherwise, new organizations would need significant support from the state (Golovina, Smirnova, 2020). Certainly, cooperative values must be improved, especially under significant external changes: in Russia, where cooperative structures are small, lack capital, have limited abilities to introduce new technologies and low competitiveness, further adherence to purely traditional principles (open membership, unlimited transactions, attractive ideology of collectivism) limits business and cooperative development.

The third practical reason for the failure of cooperation is *the rapid degradation of rural areas in Russia and the low level of trust and interaction between members of agricultural cooperatives*. In recent decades, the Russian rural population has been constantly declining, many rural territories have depopulated, hundreds of rural settlements disappeared from the map with their unique culture, stories and landscape: since 1959, the number of villages has been halved, in 13% of villages, there is no permanent population. By 2020, the total number of rural settlements in the country was less than 17 thousand, two thirds of them had a population of up to 2 thousand. Rural population is aging, the birth rate in rural areas is falling — since 2015, it has become lower than in the city, since it is not possible to stop migration from the village to the city. Rural areas of the Urals, Siberia, the Far East and in the north of European Russia have been losing their population especially fast. Thus, the number and the share of rural population in Russia continues to decline, especially in its working age part.

Rural areas are characterized by a lower level of social and engineering infrastructure than urban settlements. The level of gasification of rural areas as of January 1, 2023 was 60.2%, the level of drinking water supply — 66.5%. The situation is especially difficult with the high-quality medical and educational services, and with the available transport infrastructure. Moreover, digitalization and increased productivity in agriculture displace labor resources from it. The share of employment in agriculture decreases in all developed countries: in 2022, it was 1% in the UK, 1.6% in the USA, 2.5% in France. In Russia, the share of employed in agriculture decreased from 19.1% in 1970 to 5.8% in 2022 (agriculture, hunting and fishing combined). The share of agriculture as the main sphere of employment for villagers has declined to less than 20%. Agroholdings displace family farms. At the same time, employment in trade, services and education has grown fast, including new jobs with remote employment. However, diversification of the rural economy remains low: although in 2023, there was a significant decrease in the unemployment rate among villagers, it still exceeds the urban one by 1.8 times. In general, economic situation in rural areas is less favorable than in urban ones due to lower incomes: every fifth villager has incomes below the subsistence level, and social inequality has increased. Income stratification of the rural population forces many villagers to buy cheap products and services, which leads to a deterioration of their health and well-being.

Thus, the most active part of the rural population leaves for the city, and there is simply only a few to join the cooperative movement. According to Yanbykh, Saraykin and Lerman (2019), the potential pool of cooperators in Russia is estimated between

3.8 and 7.5 million family producers (20%–40% of all households engaged in agricultural production in 2016). Yet, the actual cooperative membership is minuscule: Russian farmers are reluctant to join cooperatives, which is understandable given the painful experience of forced collectivization in the 1930s. To overcome this reluctance, the state policies should promote public awareness campaigns and educational efforts, which are essential tools for explaining farmers the benefits of cooperation. Previous surveys in Russia and other CIS countries consistently indicated that one of the reasons for not joining cooperatives was the lack of information about this organizational form (see, e.g.: Lerman, Sedik, 2014). Such public awareness efforts require readiness and willingness of government officials. Special education and indoctrination programs should be provided for the staff of relevant ministries (food and agriculture, economy and justice), who are largely ignorant of cooperative principles and functions.

Studies of policy measures for developing service cooperatives showed that cooperatives flourish in regions that provide sufficient budgetary support, i.e., there are no trends of the bottom-up development of cooperation (Yanbykh, Saraikin, Lerman, 2019). There is also a problem of the compliance by cooperative members with the developed rules and the lack of trust as one of the social-psychological conditions for agricultural cooperatives (Golovina, Nilsson, 2009; Golovina, Volodina, 2012). The main reasons negatively affecting the development of agricultural cooperation in Russia: 1) negative experience of cooperation during perestroika; 2) agricultural producers' unwillingness to carry out transactions on a cooperative basis; 3) low level of trust among cooperators to partners and colleagues; 4) lack of experience and desire among cooperative members to participate in the democratic management (Golovina, Smirnova, 2020).

According to Saraykin and Yanbykh (2019), even today in cooperative decision-making, the leader's opinion, knowledge, experience and skills (50.4%) are of greatest importance (trust between members — 24.8%, rules for cooperative activities and relationships — 24.8%). Thus, a hierarchical system prevails in the relations of the leader with cooperative members, and neither trust nor rules play such a role. Cooperative members rely on the decisions of the cooperative leader just as they once relied on the decisions of the collective farm chairman. In general, surveys and calculations show that the existing system of internal relations in consumer cooperatives are weak and disconnected. Since a cooperative is not an ordinary company, trust between its members, supported by regulations developed in interaction, plays a more important role than strong management; otherwise, cooperative gradually turns into a hierarchical structure. Thus, the state should focus on measures for improving trust, creating

a positive attitude towards equality, solidarity and mutual assistance, i.e., for improving informal institutions to make them more relevant to the cooperative spirit and essence.

At the same time, we should not ignore the social function of cooperatives. The concept of multifunctional activities of cooperatives (1) takes into account their embeddedness in rural areas and rural society; (2) focuses not only on the economic efficiency of cooperatives but also on their social-environmental efficiency; (3) emphasizes the importance of expanding range of services of agricultural cooperatives, which provides them with new opportunities both in terms of business and social entrepreneurship (Golovina, Smirnova, 2021; Bozhkov, Nikulin, Poleshchuk, 2020).

Institutions of both mutual assistance and solidarity, which have a centuries-old history in Western societies, are not so well developed in Russia. Collective and state farms in Soviet times performed many social functions, but mainly by orders from above rather than by agreement between enterprise workers. When addressing changes in contemporary cooperatives, it is necessary to remember that the internal improvements mentioned above are associated not only with purely technological innovations but also with changes in the quality of the cooperative social capital (Deng, Hendricks, Liang, 2021): “if you do not strategically support and develop social capital, the comparative advantage of the cooperative form of business may disappear”.

Thus, agricultural cooperation in many countries has played a positive role in integrating and expressing interests of smallholders. In Russia, during the Soviet era, such an integration of small farms had turned into the creation of collective and state farms, and after the collapse of the USSR, it was easier to turn them into large capitalist agricultural holdings with a rigid hierarchical management system. The emerging smallholder farms and even more so rural households could not integrate and resist as quickly. It seems that Russia jumped over the historical period of the evolutionary development of cooperatives of small farmers straight to their transformation into market cooperative associations (Campina, Valio, etc.). However, the role of agricultural cooperatives in expressing the interests of rural residents and entrepreneurs and in solving social-economic problems and reviving rural areas has yet to be understood, since such cooperatives tend to appear in remote rural areas with poorly developed services to supply various services and goods.

Cooperatives are different from investor-oriented firms (IOFs), and cooperatives of the former socialist countries, which appeared in the early 1990s, are different from capitalist ones with a long history of development. In addition, social capital and its

characteristics are of great importance: cooperatives usually enjoy a high level of social capital at the early stages of their lifecycle, but then social capital shows a declining trend in the course of organization development. Reduction of social capital leads to an imbalance of the social-economic attributes of cooperatives, which requires corresponding changes in the cooperative governance structure. It is important for cooperatives to maintain and develop their social capital strategically over time; otherwise, the cooperative enterprise would lose its comparative advantages (Deng, Hendrikse, Liang, 2021).

Therefore, a high level of social capital can be regarded as the necessary condition for cooperation. At the formation stage, the level of social capital in the cooperative is high due to interpersonal relationships developed from the informal social interactions of its members. Trust among members and between members and management is high; members are very loyal to cooperatives and maintain a high level of commitment. Cooperatives start to lose their social capital as they enlarge — the sense of community, trust and mutual assistance disappears, the atmosphere becomes more business-oriented, and the differences between cooperatives and investor-oriented firms (IOFs) become blurred, which puts the development of agricultural cooperation in Russia at risk.

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### **Будущее сельскохозяйственных кооперативов в России: столь ли важна теория?**

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*Аннотация.* Цель статьи — определение теоретических и практических причин неудачного развития сельскохозяйственной кооперации в России. Авторы связывают подобную неуспешность сельской кооперации с общими особенностями формирования социального капитала в российской деревне, отсутствием необходимых институциональных условий и ошибочным представлением, что кооперативы, основанные на классических принципах кооперации, могут успешно функционировать в современной экономике и обществе. Первый теоретический барьер для развития кооперации состоит в том, что в современном высокотехнологичном сельском хозяйстве гибридные структуры (кооперативы) менее эффективны, чем иерархические (агрохолдинги). Второй теоретический барьер обусловлен несоответствием семи классических принципов кооперации, сформулированных еще во времена Райффайзена (т. е. устаревших), сегодняшним экономическим реалиям и их трансформациям. Третий практический барьер авторы видят в быстрой деградации сельских территорий и низком уровне доверия и взаимодействия между членами сельскохозяйственных кооперативов, что и объясняет отсутствие в России тенденции к развитию кооперации «снизу вверх». Авторы приходят к выводу, что необходимым условием кооперации является высокий уровень социального капитала: на этапе становления кооператива его обеспечивают межличностные отношения, сложившиеся из неформальных социальных взаимодействий, и высокий уровень доверия внутри коллектива кооператоров, а также между ними и руководством. Однако по мере укрупнения кооперативы начинают терять свой социальный капитал — исчезает чувство общности, доверия и взаимопомощи, социально-психологическая атмосфера в кооперативе становится более деловой (ориентированной на бизнес и прибыль).

*Ключевые слова:* кооперация, сельскохозяйственные кооперативы, классические принципы кооперации, агрохолдинги, социальный капитал, доверие, сельское развитие, сельские территории