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## **Decentralization or Manipulation?**

An Analysis of Change within Pasture Management Institutions in  
Tajikistan

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## **Abstract**

This study discusses how different agents shape institutional change in Tajikistan, and ultimately how this affects the process of decentralization within pasture management institutions. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how decentralization takes place in the context of institutional change, and to increase our understanding of the potential barriers to the effective decentralization of natural resources. Mahoney and Thelen's theory of gradual institutional change is used to determine which agents drive institutional change, and in turn, what type of change is produced as a result. The analysis is based on field notes from conferences uniting main stakeholders in pasture governance, interviews with key informants and livestock owners and a desk review of pasture management legislation. The results reveal that although there are agents actively seeking to create change, notably international organizations and parts of the government, there are also agents that seek ways to contradict it. A combination of strong veto power and a high level of discretion strengthens agents seeking to preserve the status quo. These factors are exacerbated by a high level of institutional ambiguity. Ultimately, the political and institutional environment favours agents exploiting pasture management institutions for personal gain, making the successful decentralization of pasture resources in Tajikistan unlikely.

**Key words:** institutional change, Tajikistan, pastures, decentralization, natural resource management, institutional barriers to development, institutional ambiguity, natural resource governance

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## **Abbreviations**

CoP	Commission on Pastures
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PUA	Pasture User Association
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

# **Definitions**

## **Dekhan farms**

Farm laborers' cooperatives, created as a means of transitioning away from the collective and state farms of the Soviet era (Rowe, 2010:191). In the Tajik Legal Code 'On Dekhan (Private) Farms' they are described as citizen-run cooperatives, subject to government oversight (Ibid.).

## **Hukumat**

The term means supremacy, executive power and government, and usually refers to a form of government administration (Abdullaev & Akbarzaheh, 2010:160).

## **Jamoat**

A local, self-governing group that comprises of a varying number of villages (Abdullaev & Akbarzaheh, 2010:47).

## **Pastures**

Pastures are defined as "land with low-growing vegetation cover used for grazing of livestock". Vegetation growth on pastures can include grasses, legumes, forbs like clover and milkweed, shrubs or a mixture (Sedik, 2009:193). Because there is no clear distinction between rangelands and pastures in Tajikistan, the term "pasture" is also used to refer to rangelands.

## **Rangelands**

Rangelands are characterized in two ways – as a type of land, and as a type of land use (Squires, 2011:n.p.). For the purpose of this thesis rangelands are defined as "uncultivated land that will provide the necessities of life for grazing and browsing animals and the herder families that depend on them" (Ibid.). Rangelands are the main source of forage, fuelwood, and wildlife for pastoral and agropastoral communities, and include deserts, forests, natural grasslands and shrublands (Ibid.).

## **Saharob**

A plot of land, usually pastureland, under the responsibility of village authorities. It is a form of village commons which all residents in a village may use equally e.g. for grazing. The quantity of land and specific rules of use can vary from village to village (Key informant 2).

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# 1. Introduction

Throughout the world, governments are trying to decentralize the management of natural resources (Ribot et al. 2006, Meynen & Doornbos, 2004, Larson & Ribot, 2004). Yet, throughout the world, they are failing (Ibid.). Tajikistan is one of many developing countries where institutional change is far from a straightforward process, with a multitude of different agents affecting the decentralization process. This thesis explores this phenomenon in relation to pasture management.

Pastures in Tajikistan are facing tremendous challenges. Throughout Tajikistan, livestock are the main source of income for rural populations (Robinson & Whitton, 2010; Avazov, 2013:11), and are described by academics as the “most important farm resource after land and water” (Lerman, 2012:176-177). As a landlocked country with few natural resources and over 40% of the population living below the poverty line, Tajikistan is heavily dependent on agriculture, and the widespread degradation of pastures is a major obstacle for Tajikistan’s future economic development. Constituting over 75% of the nation’s scarce arable land, pastures are a key component of the rural economy (Ibid.). However, in the past decades a combination of incomplete land reform, rapidly increasing animal populations and drastic decreases in the amount and quality of feed has led to the severe degradation of pastures and agricultural land. This, in turn, is not only environmentally unsustainable, but has also led to low animal productivity throughout the country. As households increase the size of their livestock herds in an effort to increase their income, they are locked in a cycle of land overuse and poverty (Sedik, 2010). Pasture degradation jeopardizes millions of rural livelihoods, and could potentially exacerbate the risk of instability and conflict (Squires, 2012:x).

Amid claims that government policies have consistently “ignored efficient pasture management, contributing to unsustainable use and degradation of pastures” (Lerman, 2012:178), the government of Tajikistan is attempting to improve pasture management institutions by implementing more decentralized forms of natural resource governance (United Nations Country Team, 2009: 23; Novovic, 2011).



Decentralization, defined as “the transfer of power from the central government to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy” (Larson & Ribot, 2004:3; UNDP, 1999) has been widely acclaimed as a key component of good governance and development (White, 2011; Azfar et al., 2001:5-6). Political decentralization that involves a genuine transfer of power to actors that are downwardly accountable is said to increase accountability, reduce corruption and bring local knowledge into the decision-making process, among many other benefits (Azfar et al. 2001:5-6; Ribot et al. 2006:1865; White, 2011).

This form of institutional change has come to be implemented at a global scale. In recent years, reforms for decentralizing the governance of resources have been implemented in institutions throughout the world, opening for new forms of local and non-state management of resources in the hopes of creating more sustainable and equitable forms of natural resource management with a greater degree of local participation (Meynen & Doornbos, 2004:235-236). In fact, Ribot et al argue that “[i]f one were to choose a single word to characterize the nature of institutional changes that governments have instituted across many different sectors, that word would likely be ‘decentralization’” (2006:1864).

Nonetheless, for Tajikistan decentralizing has not been as simple as it seems. The approach to agricultural reform on behalf of Tajik government “has been gradual and limited” (Lerman & Sedik, 2008:25), and the transition was complicated by the eruption of the violent civil war upon independence from the Soviet Union (Makhmadshoev et al., 2015:5). The war resulted in the almost complete destruction of economic infrastructure, and a fragile government with scarce resources to invest in the rebuilding of institutions and industry (Collins, 2003:284-285; Rowe, 2010:158). Incomplete land reform, land tenure issues and over-centralization remain some of the main challenges to the pasture management sector and rural development in Tajikistan today (World Bank, 2012:17; United Nations Country Team, 2009:17). The issue is further complicated by a lack of transparency and the concentration of power and resources in the hands of a few elites, as different actors seek to influence this process of institutional change (De Martino, 2004:8).

Tajikistan is one of many post-Soviet republics that continue to face difficulties in implementing decentralization reforms while facing the institutional and

environmental legacy of past Soviet systems. In spite of overwhelming theoretical evidence of the advantages of decentralized natural resource governance regimes, several studies have found that decentralization within natural resource governance is happening slowly, if at all (Ribot et al., 2006; Larson & Ribot, 2004). Some studies have found evidence that decentralization can strengthen local elites, increasing the risk of elite capture (Andersson, 2002; Pacheco, 2007). Decentralization outcomes have been very mixed even among the cases claimed to be most successful and the actual outcome of decentralization policies to a large extent depends on the institutional environment (Andersson & Ostrom, 2008; Azfar et al., 2001; Bardhan & Mookherjee, 1998). The varied outcomes of decentralized resource regimes points to a gap in existing research and highlights the need for an increased understanding of how decentralized resource regimes come into existence, and how they are implemented within a general context of institutional change. Tajikistan is relevant to this study as an exemplifying case – it is by no means unique or extreme case, but rather provides a suitable backdrop for the study of how natural resource governance institutions develop.

## 1.1 Purpose and Research Question

This thesis aims to fill the gap in the research by exploring the factors that affect institutional change, and by extension natural resource governance, in the context of decentralization. The purpose of this thesis is to gain insight into how decentralization processes are affected by the general process of institutional change, and to gain a deeper understanding of the potential barriers for effective decentralization of natural resource management. Therefore, this thesis attempts to answer the question:

*How are different agents shaping institutional change in Tajikistan, and how does this affect the decentralization process within pasture management institutions?*

The thesis takes the form of a qualitative case study. The process of institutional change in the pasture sector in Tajikistan is examined using the theory of gradual institutional change proposed by Mahoney and Thelen (2010). The theory seeks to explain how and why institutional change occurs by examining institutional agents and how they negotiate institutional ambiguities related to the enforcement and

implementation of rules. I had the unique opportunity to observe how these ambiguities were negotiated in practice over the course of two conferences, which united a range of different stakeholders involved in the drafting and implementation of pasture management legislation. As such, the thesis is based on field observations from the conferences, interviews with key informants and livestock owners and a desk review of relevant documents. In applying this framework to the case of pasture management institutions in Tajikistan, I hope to make both a theoretical and empirical contribution to this under researched area of the world, while also contributing to a deeper understanding of how the relationship between the institutional environment and the efficacy of decentralization policies. The results of this research are not only relevant for the future development in Tajikistan, but can also contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors affecting policy implementation, particularly in the contexts of transition economies and natural resource governance.

## 1.2 Disposition

This study is structured as follows. Chapter two contains a literature review of existing research about the relationship between institutions and natural resource governance. In chapter three institutions are defined and the theoretical framework is presented. This is followed by chapter four, in which the methodology is described, and chapter five, which contains the analysis. The sixth and final chapter consists of concluding remarks.

## **2. Literature Review**

In this thesis, the process of institutional change is studied through the lens of decentralization of natural resource management institutions. In section 2.1 the relationship between institutions and natural resource governance is presented in the context of previous research. This is followed by a short overview of previous research about natural resource governance specifically in Tajikistan in section 2.2.

## 2.1 Institutions and Natural Resource Governance

The role of institutional arrangements in managing natural resources can in many ways be traced back to Hardin's famous analogy "The Tragedy of the Commons". Hardin advocated for the advantages of state and private property institutions over communal means of resource management, warning about the pitfalls of shared management of resources (Hardin, 1968; Cole et al., 2014). Since then, the benefits and disadvantages of private, state and community-based resource management systems have been extensively debated (Meynen & Doornbos, 2004:237). Until the 1980s, research about natural resource governance was often based on the assumption that self-organization among resource users was impossible, thus leading to recommendations of government or private ownership based on theorists like Hardin (1968) and Gordon (1954) (Cox et al., 2010:1). However, in following decades the imposition of private ownership regimes was increasingly questioned, and the perception of natural resources as a common, or collective, good emerged, along with the understanding that Hardin's tragedy can be avoided through collective action (Araral, 2014:12).

Much of the research within this field has been devoted to understanding the conditions and institutional designs that lead to the successful collective management of natural resources. In her renowned work "Governing the Commons" (1990), Ostrom identifies several design principles that characterize enduring natural resource governing systems. These include, but are not limited to, clearly defined boundaries, the ability of resource users to tailor rules to local circumstances, the need for monitoring and sanctions, and the overall importance of resource user participation in effective governance (1990:100-102). Ostrom's findings were of pivotal importance, and have served as the departure point for several ensuing studies about the benefits of local resource governance systems. Authors seeking to further develop this field, have called attention to the social relationships and structures that affect resource governance (Sick 2008), the importance of community structures (Tang, 1996), and how the motivations of individual resource users shape natural resource use (Baur et al 2014). "Making resource protectors out of potential resource destroyers" (McKean, 1996:227) and the efficacy of institutions designed and enforced by the resource users themselves has been increasingly recognized as the "best" means of governing natural

resources, and is supported by a vast body of research (e.g. Ostrom, 2007; Morrow and Hull, 1996; De Moor, Shaw-Taylor and Warde, 2002).

Yet, in spite of the theoretical advantages of decentralizing natural resource governance, research also shows that the practical implementation of decentralized governance schemes is far from straight forward. In an extensive review of case studies representing some of the most successful examples of decentralization of natural resource governance, Larsson and Ribot conclude that “the democratic decentralization of natural resource management is *barely happening*”, and that the power of local institutions is frequently curtailed or limited by central governments (Larson & Ribot 2004:5, emphasis in original). This is echoed by Manor (2004) who studies the implementation of user committees, a form of decentralized resource management that has become increasingly popular throughout the world. Manor finds that user committees are often used by governments to impose controls, and that they have a negative impact on decentralization reforms. Other studies emphasize that in some cases decentralization even appears to have strengthened local elites (Andersson & Ostrom, 2008:72), and that local governance regimes “only rarely [...] provide evidence for the emergence of downwardly accountable local decision makers who are able to effectively exercise their powers” (Ribot et al, 2006: 1867).

The challenges inherent to decentralization have led to discussions about the need to further research the impact of different agents and processes of institutional change on natural resource management (Sick 2008:97; Meynen & Doornbos 2004:240; Andersson & Ostrom 2008:73). In a case study of the forestry sectors in Bolivia, Peru and Guatemala, Andersson and Ostrom find that “the key to effective governance arrangements lies in the relationships among actors who have a stake in the governance of the resource” (2008:88). They highlight the need for a deeper understanding of how relationships among multiple, overlapping authorities at different management levels shape resource governance, arguing that there is an absence of empirical studies of multi-level dynamics in this field. Meynen and Doornbos (2004) come to a similar conclusion, but place special emphasis on the role of international actors. They conclude that international pressures to decentralize can lead to policy inconsistencies and hinder effective decentralization, especially in weak states without a large resource base. The varied outcomes of decentralized resource

regimes suggests that there is a need for more research that takes the influence of a multitude of institutional agents into account, while also considering a broader institutional context.

## 2.2. Natural Resource Governance in Tajikistan

The literature in this field relating to specifically to Tajikistan is scarce, however, there are a few noteworthy contributions. In his study of land reform in Tajikistan after independence from the Soviet Union, Rowe (2010) shows that many elements of the Soviet system remain unchanged, partly because privatization of agricultural resources could lead to a decrease in income for rural elites. Sehring (2007) also makes an interesting contribution in a comparative case study of water governance in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and the prevalence of informal rules in Water User Associations (WUAs) in the two countries.

Nonetheless, the study of natural resource management institutions in Central Asia and particularly in a post-Soviet institutional context remains a narrow field. The research conditions in Tajikistan have been seen as unfavorable during the past few decades, with many researchers perceiving it as an unstable location with ongoing violence, leading to the country in general being under researched (Rowe, 2010:190). Authors also note that there is a “conspicuous lack of evidence-based policy dialogue with the government on the effectiveness of land and agricultural policies in Tajikistan”, and that scientific evaluations of policies and reforms are lacking (Lerman & Sedik, 2008:1). Furthermore, considering the extremely mountainous terrain of the country, there is a need for “special emphasis” on the proper management and “strong, high-quality governance” of pasture resources to optimize agriculture while minimizing erosion (Lerman & Sedik, 2008:9). Considering the importance of pastures to rural livelihood strategies in Tajikistan, this research fills a highly relevant gap in the in-depth knowledge of this remote and difficult to access country.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

In order to analyze institutional change within pasture management institutions Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) theory of gradual institutional change is applied. In the first section of this chapter institutions are discussed and defined. The second section describes the theoretical underpinnings to institutional change upon which this study rests. This is followed by a description of Mahoney and Thelen's framework of gradual institutional change and its components, including mechanisms of change, types of change and agents of change.

#### **3.1 Institutions as Instruments of Power**

For the purpose of this thesis, institutions are defined as “the humanly devised constraints imposed on human interaction”, consisting of formal and informal rules and their enforcement characteristics, in line with the definition proposed by North (1993:97). In other words, institutions can be understood as systems of established rules that shape and define human interactions (Hodgson, 2006:2). Formal rules include, for instance, laws, constitutions and property rights, while informal rules can include codes of conduct, traditions, or taboos (North, 1993:97). Within the scope of this thesis, the main institutions of interest are pasture management institutions, which are understood as the collections of formal and informal rules governing the use and management of pastures in Tajikistan at national and local levels. Additionally, a key aspect of this approach is the view of institutions as distributional instruments rather than coordinating devices (Mahoney, 2010:15). As such, institutions are not neutral structures, but in fact “are settlements born from struggle and bargaining. They reflect the resources and power of those who made them, and in turn, affect the distribution of resources and power in society” (Campbell, 2004:1).

#### **3.2 Understanding Institutional Change**

The theoretical approach used throughout this thesis emerges from the field of historical institutionalism. Unlike sociological and rational choice perspectives on institutions, historical institutionalists emphasize power asymmetries and historical legacies as factors shaping institutions (Béland, 2007:21). Institutions are seen as

“enduring legacies of political struggles”, and there is emphasis on political and institutional development as a process (Thelen, 1999:388). Thelen emphasizes the importance of examining institutions as dynamic structures that continually produce unintended results as “different, ongoing processes interact” (Idem.:383-384). Therefore, the point of focus for this thesis is not institutional outcomes that result from institutional change, but the process of institutional change itself. The emphasis on process over outcome is a highly relevant approach for this study, considering that the decentralization of existing institutions and the creation of new institutions in Tajikistan are very much ongoing. While it is not possible to evaluate the result of these changes yet, a critical examination of how institutional change occurs and the role different agents within this process is a highly relevant subject, considering that it is likely to influence the development of natural resource governance in Tajikistan in the future.

Defining institutions as power-laden actors impacts how institutional change is conceptualized. Institutional theory has been criticized for failing to adequately explain why and how institutions change over time during periods of relative stability (Dacin et al., 2002: 45; Béland, 2007:22-23). Much of the literature in this field is dedicated to explaining the permanence of institutions over time, or describes institutional change as a consequence external shocks or shifts for instance in response to shifting power balances or at “critical junctures”, with institutions frequently being understood as self-sustaining or self-reinforcing (Powell, 1991:197, Jepperson, 1991:145). Recognizing that power dynamics are inherent to most institutions opens for the possibility of institutions changing not only in response to external shocks, but as a response to pressures and tensions from within (Béland, 2007). As a result, institutional permanence or stability cannot simply be seen as a constant variable, independent of power struggles. Rather, the stability of institutions over time to some extent depends on the effort and mobilization of resources on behalf of actors actively seeking to maintain the institution (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:9). Similarly, agents disadvantaged by the institutional current arrangements may instigate change because it benefits them (Idem.:22).

In recent years, efforts have been made to address this critique, and a more evolutionary approach to institutional change has emerged (Béland 2007:21, Streeck

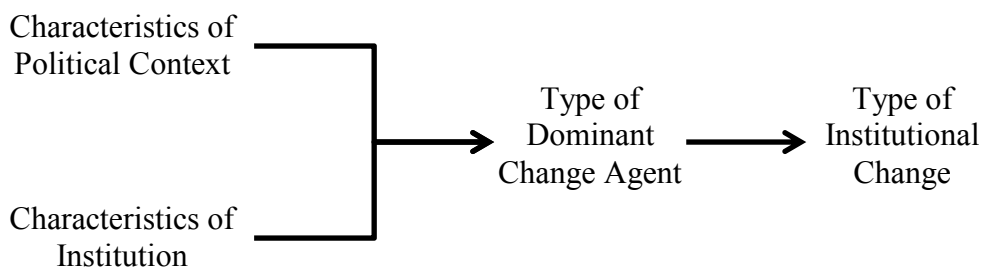


and Thelen, 2005; Hacker, 2004, Tridico, 2011:119). However, empirical evidence remains limited, and existing frameworks have been criticized for not adequately explaining why certain types of change take place rather than others, or what mechanisms affect the direction of change (Béland 2007:23). In order to fill the gaps identified in current institutional research, Mahoney and Thelen develop a theory for gradual institutional change (2010:7).

### 3.3 A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change

Drawing on previous studies of evolutionary change, Mahoney and Thelen (2010) propose a framework that seeks to not just categorize the type of institutional change taking place, but also to explain how the change is related to the political and institutional environment. The authors argue that different types of agents can exist within institutions, with each type of agent attempting to produce a certain type of change. The agents that emerge as dominant and the type of institutional change that is created depend on the political context and the characteristics of the institution, as illustrated in Figure 1. In sum, the model provides a means of understanding how different political and institutional contexts influence the type of change-agent that emerges, which, in turn, influences the type of institutional change taking place. The elements of the model are further discussed in the upcoming sections.

Figure 1. Framework Explaining Modes of Institutional Change



Source: The author, adapted from Mahoney & Thelen 2010:15.

#### *Mechanisms of Change*

The role of the political and institutional context in shaping the change that takes place within institutions is closely linked to two mechanisms of change, namely *compliance* and *institutional ambiguity*. Rather than taking the enforcement of and

compliance with institutional rules for granted, Mahoney and Thelen argue that the need to enforce institutions is what makes change possible. The rules governing institutions can be both formal and informal, and expectations guiding institutional enforcement are often ambiguous and subject to interpretation (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:11). Furthermore, institutions are hierarchical structures, and the practical enforcement and implementation of rules often falls into the hands of different actors than those who designed the rules (Idem:13). In order to implement and enforce institutions, actors need to negotiate these ambiguities with each other, with some elements of rule-enforcement being left up to individual judgment. This creates space for institutional change, where actors can influence how institutions work by for instance choosing to enforce existing rules to varying extents, different interpretations of rules, or applying of old rules in new contexts (Idem:11-13). In other words, the authors hypothesize that institutional change is more likely to occur in environments characterized by high degrees of institutional ambiguity, where uncertainty over interpretation, enforcement affects compliance with existing rules. This creates openings where actors seeking to change institutions have the opportunity to influence institutional processes and drive change.

The characteristics of the political and institutional context affect the extent to which the opportunities for institutional change exist. The authors define the political context by the extent to which actors defending the status quo are able to exercise veto power, while the institutional context is defined by the level of discretion agents have in interpreting and enforcing rules (2010:18). If the agents resisting change have access to means of blocking change, whether formally or informally, this is a form of veto power, which makes it more difficult for agents seeking change to mobilize resources and influence rules. At the same time, a high level of discretion in enforcing the rules also influences the capacities of agents to create change, and is related to the previously discussed issue of compliance. If there is a low level of discretion in implementing rules, change is less likely, since it makes it more difficult to apply a different interpretation of compliance in practice. In other words, the extent to which actors resisting change can exercise veto power, and the level of discretion when interpreting and enforcing institutional rules affects the type of change taking place.

### *Types of Change*

Drawing from previous work by Streeck and Thelen (2005) and Hacker (2004), Mahoney and Thelen identify four types of institutional change and how they take place, namely displacement, layering, conversion and drift. *Displacement* refers to the type of change that occurs when old rules are replaced with new rules. This can occur in the form of abrupt, radical shifts, for instance if a revolution breaks down existing rules and institutions. However, it is worth noting that displacement is not necessarily always fast. New institutions can also emerge alongside existing old institutions, and directly challenge them over a period of time, which can be a slow, lengthy process. An example of this is the emergence of market-oriented institutions in China, where the old system must contend with new ones (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:16).

The second type of change is *layering*. Layering occurs when new rules are added onto an existing institutional framework. This includes amendments or revisions to existing rules. Although layering may only result in small changes in the short term, small changes can accumulate in the long run. Actors that disagree with current institutional rules but lack the capacity to overtly challenge them may seek to change institutions by layering, while defenders of the status quo may be able to prevent the removal of old rules, they may not be able to prevent the addition of new rules to the same extent.

*Drift*, the third type of change, occurs when institutional rules formally remain the same, but external circumstances change the impact of the rules. In other words, if the environment in which the rules are applied changes drastically, neglecting to adjust the rules can change the impact that the institution has on its environment.

Finally, *conversion* occurs when institutional rules remain the same, but their impact is changed because they are interpreted and enforced in new ways. It is worth emphasizing that this type of change is not the unintended result of failing to adjust rules to new external circumstances, as can be the case in drift, but rather an intentional exploitation of ambiguities within rules and institutions to change their meaning.

### *Agents of Change*

Mahoney and Thelen present four different types of change agents that can drive institutional change. These are insurrectionaries, symbionts, subversives and opportunists. The agents are characterized based on two basic factors – whether they seek to preserve existing institutional rules, and whether they abide by existing institutional rules. The first actor type, *insurrectionaries*, actively seeks to eliminate existing rules and institutions, and openly opposes them. Insurrectionaries reject the status quo, and when they succeed it can lead to abrupt change, where old rules and status quo are replaced by “radically new rules” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:24). As a result, insurrectionaries are frequently associated with *displacement*.

*Symbionts*, on the other hand, “rely (and thrive) on institutions that are not of their own making” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:24). These actors can fall into two categories, parasitic and mutualistic. Parasitic actors exploit weaknesses in the institutions for personal gain, in spite of the fact that they depend on the general functioning of the institution for survival. Mutualistic actors also rely on the general functioning of the institutions, and also use ambiguities and weaknesses to advance their own personal interests. Unlike parasitic actors however, mutualistic actors manipulate the rules in ways that strengthen the institution and its purpose. Parasitic actors are generally associated with *drift*, while mutualistic actors are associated with an increased robustness of the institutions rather than a type of change.

The third category type refers to *subversives*. Subversives do not agree with the institutional status quo, and seek to change it. However, unlike the insurrectionaries, they do not try to change it overtly. Instead they seek change while simultaneously complying with the rules and following institutional expectations, and in doing so in a sense “disguise the extent of their preference for institutional change” (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:25). In other words, subversives “work *against* the system from *within* it” (Idem:26, emphasis in original). In order to achieve their goals, subversives may encourage change by supporting the creation of new rules or subtly alter the way in which rules are implemented. As a result, subversives are associated with both *layering* and *conversion*.

The fourth and final category is *opportunists*. Mahoney and Thelen describe opportunists as having “ambiguous preferences about institutional continuity” (2010:27). Opportunists favor institutional arrangements that favor them, whether this means preserving old rules or supporting the creation of new ones. However, it should be noted that opportunists most often prefer to act within the existing system, and rarely favor radical change. Mahoney and Thelen point to the existence of opportunists as an explanation for institutional inertia, as well as why it is more difficult to change than to preserve the status quo (2010:26-27). As a result, opportunists emerge as actors that can both create and prevent change. However, in the instances that they contribute to change, opportunists are frequently associated with institutional *conversion*, where existing rules are manipulated to suit their interests. The institutional agents that exist and the type of change they are associated with are summarized in figure 2.

Figure 2. Institutional Agents and Types of Institutional Change

<b>Type of Agent</b>	<b>Type of Change</b>
Insurrectionaries	<i>Displacement</i>
Parasitic Symbionts Mutualistic Symbionts	<i>Drift</i> Increased Robustness
Subversives	<i>Layering and Conversion</i>
Opportunists	<i>Conversion</i>

Source: The author

Finally, it is important to note that although there are agents seeking to change the system, one must also take into account the agents who seek to maintain it. The stability of institutions over time to some extent depends on the effort and mobilization of resources on behalf of actors actively seeking to maintain the institution (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:9). This can include agents that are reluctant to change institutions because they benefit from them, but other factors may also come into play. For instance, decision-makers often lack sufficient information about the issues they want to address, and as a consequence they are “generally reluctant to

make sweeping policy decisions that would dramatically transform institutions”, instead opting for only marginal changes (Campbell, 2004:33).

In order to influence the processes taking place within institutions, actors can participate in a range of behaviors in an attempt to exercise power over other actors within the institutions, in order to influence policy or institutional outcomes. This can include behavior such as vetoing, enforcing institutional rules to suit their own interests, or exploiting ambiguities to create institutional outcomes in their favor (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:9). Actors may also engage in behaviors such as non-decision making. Non-decision making is a behavior in which an actor exercises power by consciously or unconsciously preventing certain issues from appearing on the agenda, and in doing so preventing other actors from bringing up or addressing issues that could be detrimental to his or her interests (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962:949).

#### *Determining Dominant Agents*

The goal of applying Mahoney and Thelen’s model to Tajikistan is to determine which agents dominate the process of change, in turn allowing us to understand what type of change is taking place and why. The agent that emerges as dominant is defined by the level of discretion in enforcing institutions and the relative strength of the veto power exercised by agents seeking to preserve the status quo. The relationship between these factors is described in figure 3 below.

As can be seen in the figure, strong veto possibilities together with a low level of discretion in enforcing and interpreting rules, leads subversives to emerge as the dominant actor. Strong veto possibilities make successful change of rules unlikely while a low level of discretion makes it difficult for agents of change to change the interpretation of rules, making layering the most likely strategy of change. The application of this framework to Tajikistan allows us to shed some light on which agents seek to change pasture management institutions. Discussing the agents of change and how their influence is affected by the political and institutional environment, will enable us to understand which agents are dominant, and how this is likely to affect the decentralization process in Tajikistan.

Figure 3. Contextual Characteristics and Dominant Change Agents

	<b>Low Level of Discretion</b>	<b>High Level of Discretion</b>
<b>Strong Veto Possibilities</b>	Subversives <i>Layering</i>	Symbionts <i>Drift</i>
<b>Weak Veto Possibilities</b>	Insurrectionaries <i>Displacement</i>	Opportunists <i>Conversion</i>

Source: The author, adapted from Mahoney & Thelen 2010:19.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design and Approach

I engage in this research with an ambition to gain in-depth understanding of pasture management institutions in Tajikistan, as well as to produce research that contributes to the theoretical understanding of institutional change. Flyvberg states that “from both an understanding-oriented and an action-oriented perspective, it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how often they occur” (2006:229). Approaching this issue through the lens of a qualitative case study enables me to explore the issue in the context of Tajikistan, while also allowing me to engage in a theoretical analysis (Bryman, 2012:57).

Tajikistan is relevant to this study as an exemplifying case (Bryman, 2012:56). Although every case by definition is unique, it is also important to note that Tajikistan shares many characteristics with other developing countries struggling with natural resource management, including weak and/or developing institutions, governance issues, lack of financial resources, and low transparency. In this sense, Tajikistan is not a unique or extreme case, but rather provides a suitable backdrop for the study of how natural resource governance institutions develop and change.

## 4.2 Data Collection

Case studies are often characterized by extensive data collection stemming from multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2012:75). The means of data collection include a desk review of relevant documents, in-field observations and interviews, each of which is further described below. Tajikistan has limited civil liberties and conducting research that is perceived as politically sensitive or threatening by government authorities is not free of risk<sup>1</sup> (Freedom House, 2013). Given that the restrictive political environment in Tajikistan and the fact that this thesis discusses politically sensitive issues such as power and the distribution of resources, the data collection process required a great degree of caution and pragmatism. For this reasons, all participants and organizations in the study will remain anonymous. Data collection took place in the period between December, 2014 and January, 2015, after a five month long presence in the country. The time spent living in the field prior allowed me to take an inductive approach to the research and increase my understanding of the Tajik context (Bryman, 2012:366).

### *In-field Observations*

The in-field observations include notes from two conferences relating to pasture management in Tajikistan. The conferences were a concrete manifestation of the space where the ambiguities of implementation and enforcement are discussed and negotiated among institutional actors, were an important means of observing the institutional environment and the relationships between different actors in an unobtrusive and neutral manner.

I attended the conferences as an observer, and did not directly participate in any of the discussions. My presence was facilitated by gatekeepers from international organizations, which were active within the field of pasture management. The first

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<sup>1</sup> One notable incident includes the arrest of a PhD student accused of espionage while conducting research on behalf of the University of Toronto in Tajikistan in 2014 (Rickleton, 2014).



conference was dedicated to discussing the general implementation of the new law on pastures while the second conference focused primarily on the establishment of Pasture User Associations (PUAs). Both conferences united a range of stakeholders within pasture management, including representatives from organizations, local and national governance structures (for more details see Appendix I).

There is a general unwillingness to discuss politically sensitive issues such as institutional dynamics or power relations candidly. The choice to gather data as a neutral observer was a means of mitigating this issue, as face-to-face interviews could easily have been perceived by the participants as confrontational, or lead participants to consciously or unconsciously manipulate data in order to exemplify or diminish existing power dynamics. As such, the conferences were one of the most important sources of information and offered unique insights into the policy-making and implementation process and how different actors relate to each other.

### *Interviews*

Interviews are described as “one of the most important sources of case study evidence” (Yin, 2003:110). A total number of 26 interviews were completed, of which two were interviews with key informants from international organizations working within the field of pasture management, and 24 were with livestock owners in rural areas (see Appendix II for list of respondents). The interviews were semi-structured, and were centered around a few predetermined topics, each lasting for approximately 30 minutes. The key informant interviews were held in English and interviews with livestock owners were held in Tajik and facilitated by a translator. The questions were structured according to a flexible guide rather than a formal questionnaire (see Appendix III and IV for interview guides), with new questions sometimes being introduced during the course of the interview (Mikkelsen, 2005:169). This approach created a more relaxed, informal environment, and kept interviews from becoming unnecessarily long while allowing me to adjust the questions to participants’ individual experiences. This became increasingly important as the data collection progressed and I realized that respondents’ knowledge and experiences of pasture management issues varied greatly depending on factors like village size, proximity to cities, the number of livestock owned and gender.

### *Desk Review of Relevant Documents*

According to Yin documents are an important means of corroborating information from other sources, and “play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case study research” (2003:107). The documents reviewed in this study include primary sources in the form of legal texts, and secondary sources in the form of academic articles and reports from NGOs. It is important to recognize that NGOs are not neutral actors, and that interpreting organization reports as neutral truths is problematic. Nonetheless, it has been necessary to use reports conducted by NGOs in order to gain up to date and relevant information given the limited literature available in English that specifically relates to pasture management in Tajikistan.

### 4.3 Sampling Strategy

In the selection of sites for in-field observations and interview participants a purposive sampling strategy was used in order to ensure that those interviewed were relevant to the research question at hand (Bryman, 2012:415). The sample of key informants included representatives from international organizations who have been working within the field of pasture management for a prolonged period of time, and who have in-depth knowledge both of the political context as well as practical issues related to implementation.

Livestock owners were sampled in accordance with a maximum variation sampling strategy in order to get a more representative sample as well as to get an idea of how issues related to pasture management affected different types of livestock owners. The sampling strategy included interviewing livestock owners of both genders, as well as livestock owners with differing sizes of livestock herds, household sizes, sources of income, and geographic locations. Due to the political circumstances described above, I depended on gatekeepers for safe access to participants. This somewhat limited my ability to sample purposefully among livestock owners, as the choice of participants was sometimes left up to the gatekeepers’ discretion. However, I attempted to mitigate this issue and ensure a variety within the sample by clearly explaining my research purpose to gatekeepers, and citing key criterion for selection.

#### 4.4 Analysis of Data, Reliability, and Validity

Throughout the data collection process I relied on field notes to record interview participants' responses as well as my observations from the field. Gatekeepers strongly discouraged audio recordings, stating that recordings done by anyone other than journalists or government officials were illegal, and that interview participants would fear their opinions being broadcasted in news or radio, which would significantly affect their responses. To generate trust between the participants and myself as well as to ensure the safety of everyone involved, all interviews were documented in note form.

In order to maintain the reliability of field notes and interview data, I adhered to Spradley's recommendation of taking short notes at the time and expanding them as soon as possible after each session (Spradley in Silverman, 2013:219). Notes from field sessions included notes about the atmosphere of the session, tone and body language of participants, as well as the content of the participants' statements. The resulting data was coded manually in several phases, and systematically arranged according to recurring themes and concepts present in the analytical model (Saldaña, 2013:7-10).

The thesis is based on several means of data collection, which has enabled me to observe different perspectives on the issue and use data triangulation to validate my findings (Yin, 2003:121). Throughout the data analysis, I strived to assess all information critically, with due regard to the context in which it was produced. The ability to triangulate data and findings was especially important given the complexity of the issue being studied and the sensitive political context, which is characterized by low levels of trust for government authorities and outsiders, as well as a general unwillingness to speak candidly about politically sensitive issues. Using multiple sources of data allowed me to cross check my findings, and ensures the validity of the study (Bryman, 2012:32).

## 4.5 Limitations and Ethics

Collecting data in a sensitive political environment had several implications for this research. Certain precautions were required in order to protect interview participants, the translator as well as myself, which increased my dependency on gatekeepers and limited my ability to ask certain types of questions, particularly questions related to power asymmetries, corruption and other issues that could be seen as politically sensitive.

These aspects of the political environment affected the process of gaining consent. The importance of gaining consent from research subjects, preferably through the signature of a consent form, is emphasized in academic literature (Silverman, 2013:312; Creswell, 2012:134). However, asking interview participants to sign a formal document identifying them could easily be misunderstood, would have severely undermined their trust and compromised the information they were willing to share. For this reason I chose to ask for verbal consent, and began each interview with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, and stating that participants were free to leave the interview at any time, or refuse to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. I also guaranteed anonymity, in line with Creswell's proposed consent form (2012:123). To further illustrate my commitment to maintaining the anonymity of participants I did not ask for names or any identifying details other than those directly relevant to the study. Nonetheless, in spite of efforts to create trust, it was clear that in some cases I was not perceived as a neutral actor, and was sometimes treated with a high degree of suspicion, which could have influenced their responses. This issue was somewhat mitigated by the gatekeepers, who were familiar with the participants and helped create a more relaxed environment.

It is also important to note the fact that the legal framework for pasture management and its implementing institutions are large and complex, with many interrelating actors and power dynamics. My ability to partake in the conferences allowed me a degree of insight into a complex and elusive institutional process that would otherwise have been off limits. However, it is also important to recognize that the size of the sample is small, and that some aspects or agents affecting the institutional process may not have been immediately obvious in the specific conferences I

attended. Although a larger sample would have benefitted the study, this was not possible within the timeframe, given that conferences were relatively rare events. There may be additional elements of the decision-making process that took place outside of the forums I had access to, for instance in the form of personal conversations between institutional actors, private correspondence, or informal decision-making processes. I attempt to mitigate this issue with the use of multiple sources and the triangulation of data, but this remains a challenge within this subject of research.

Furthermore, the data collection process took place during the winter. Due to weather conditions and lack of infrastructure, the geographical area of study was limited to regions relatively near the capital. This may somewhat skew the results, as the conditions and quantities of pastures vary greatly throughout the country, and the regions near the capital are generally more affluent and have access to a greater quantity of land. Finally, the language barrier was also a limitation to this study. Although key informants spoke English, the conferences attended as well as the interviews with villagers were held in Tajik with the help of a translator, which may have affected the reliability of the information. This was mitigated by consistently asking follow up questions and cross checking answers with respondents.

## **5. Analysis**

In this section Mahoney and Thelen's theory of gradual institutional change is applied to documents, interviews and observations from the field. In the first section agents that are actively seeking to create change and decentralize pasture management and the means by which they are trying to do it are presented. This is followed by a discussion of the political and institutional context, and the role of institutional ambiguity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of which agents that emerge as dominant in the process of institutional change, and, in turn, what it means for the decentralization process in Tajikistan.

## 5.1 Agents of Change

When describing the actors and the change occurring in the pasture management sector in Tajikistan, it is important to consider the national context. The creation of effective pasture management mechanisms is strongly linked with Tajikistan's transition to a market-based economy and overall efforts to further decentralize the country. In the national development assistance framework, over-centralization, constrained and poorly developed local governance, and lack of accountability and transparency are identified as key obstacles for development (United Nations Country Team, 2009:17). Due to the lack of government resources to implement reforms, international organizations like the UNDP and the World Bank have a prominent role in funding and implementing projects that serve this purpose (United Nations Country Team, 2009). One of the most recent defining features of pasture institutions that unites agents from the government as well as international organizations is the new law on pastures. The basic principles of the law are presented in the section below.

### *The New Law on Pastures*

The most concrete step towards the decentralization of pasture management can be seen in a new law on pastures passed in 2013 (Law on Pasture, 2013). Pastures in Tajikistan are the property of the state, and the rights to use pastures are allocated by the government, state agencies, district governments and local self-governing bodies, also known as *jamoats* (Wilkes, 2014:11). In theory the 2013 Pasture Law contributes to the decentralization of pasture governance by increasing accountability and the influence of local actors through the creation of three new pasture institutions: Pasture User Associations (PUAs), a Commission on Pastures (CoP), and a government pasture agency.

The PUAs created by the new law are intended to be independent public bodies consisting of pasture users. User associations, also referred to as user committees and user groups, have been implemented extensively throughout the world, particularly in low income countries, and are common features of natural resource governance schemes and development programmes (Manor, 2004:6). They are seen as a means of bringing development initiatives closer to local levels, giving individuals at grass root

levels a sense of ownership, as well as giving them a greater degree of influence in policy processes and decision-making and enabling them to assert themselves (Manor, 2004:194-195). In Tajikistan, the recognition of PUAs as legal entities will allow, for instance, whole villages or groups of households to jointly lease land from the state and participate in medium and long-term pasture planning. Other functions of the PUAs include capacity building, settling land disputes, and engaging in “effective use of pastures” (Wilkes, 2014: 11; Law on Pasture, 2013).

The CoP, the second institution created by the new law, can be seen as another means of furthering decentralization by increasing accountability. The CoP should be established by the assembly of people’s representatives at a district level, and will include representatives from government bodies, local self-governing bodies, experts on land management as well as representatives of pasture users (Wilkes, 2014:11). In theory, the CoP has a wide range of functions, including regulating pasture use, settling land disputes, providing recommendations to support district governments in decision-making, and pasture management functions (Wilkes, 2014:11). Finally, the government pasture agency created by the law designates several key regulatory functions, including the development of standard norms and methods for pasture management, the monitoring of pasture use, as well as implementation of state pasture management programmes to an authorized government body.

#### *Agents of Change at Government Levels*

With this in mind, the government of Tajikistan can be considered one of the main actors driving current institutional change, for instance in the adherence to the above mentioned development strategy and in the drafting and approval of legislation for this purpose. Nonetheless, it is also important to note that “the government” is in itself a large, complex structure that contains several different types of actors at national and local levels. At the national level, the drafting and passing of the new law on pastures indicates the presence of subversive agents seeking to create change in the form of layering. However, observations show that actors representing more local levels of governance, such as the district representatives, were more outspoken in their approach to change, with some acting as insurrectionaries openly speaking out against existing institutions, and others who seemed to resist change in general.

It is also important to account for the possibility that some agents within the government structure also seek to directly counteract rather than support the changes to the pasture legislation, by acting as opportunists or symbionts. In fact, Larson and Ribot argue that one of the reasons natural resources seem so difficult to decentralize is because of their value to both local livelihoods as well as ruling elites (2004:4). While decentralizing natural resource management is an opportunity to further include local populations and authorities in policy- and decision-making, it also often includes “a threat to local authorities and elites who fear a loss of income or patronage resources”, resulting in central government bodies and elites attempting to further control resources (Larson & Ribot, 2004:4). This is highly likely to be the case given that political power and control over economic resources in Tajikistan is concentrated among a limited number of ruling elites that control governmental and legal institutions (De Martino, 2004:8). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that in addition to the agents directly observed within this study, there are also more covert actors and means in which power is exercised that may not always be visible.

#### *International Organizations as Agents of Change*

Through discussions with key informants as well as the conferences, it became clear that the most influential actors within the field of pasture management other than government and state institutions were international organizations and NGOs (Key informant 1, Conference 1). In addition to funding and implementing several programmes designed to improve pasture management, they were also instrumental in the drafting of the pasture law and are key implementing partners. There are currently at least seven ongoing internationally funded projects dedicated to improving pasture management, six of which directly seek to address institutional issues (Wilkes, 2014:25-26). The financial contributions from international donors in this field are substantial – for instance the projects implemented by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have received over 30 million USD in funding (IFAD, n.d.).

Although international organizations are openly critical of the current pasture management institutions, it is also clear that they seek to work with the government



and existing institutional structures rather than against them. Their presence in the country as well as their ability to do their work is directly dependent on the government sanctioning their activities and cooperation with government institutions. Thus, international actors are best understood as subversives – actors seeking to change the system from within, that do not seek to preserve current institutions, but who follow its rules (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:23). The creation of the new law on pastures and the emergence of spaces in which international organizations can work at village levels to support institutional development is a case of layering - in recognizing that it would be too costly and difficult to change existing institutions, the agents attempting to change the institutions have instead added new rules to the existing framework. It is worth noting that this is still a work in progress - several bylaws serving to clarify and further specify the new law on pastures and the institutions it created are currently in the process of being drafted, in what at least on the surface appears to be a promising development towards the decentralization of pasture management institutions. However, in order to judge the “degree and permanence” of the change being created it is necessary to look further into the political and institutional context.

### *Absent Agents of Change*

Finally it is worth noting that one group of actors remain conspicuous in their absence – namely those who are arguably the most affected by the institutions, the pasture users themselves. Although they can be considered to be indirectly represented through government agents like district representatives, it is interesting to note that they do not emerge as actors in their own right. Furthermore, given the authoritarian and highly centralized system of government in Tajikistan the extent to which district representatives are truly representative can be called into doubt (De Martino, 2004). The absence of livestock owners as independent agents could stem from the sites of data collection – farmers and villagers are not invited to conferences with policy-makers, and no livestock owners from villages in which a PUA had been established were interviewed. Furthermore, in the villages visited, several participants expressed a lack of will or desire to work with livestock in the first place, stating that they did it due to lack of other choices (e.g. interviews 1, 3, 7, 9, 18). This in combination with the fact that the income in general is very low, together with a lack of

capacity/incomplete understanding of the benefits of pasture management seems to indicate that there are few motives for villagers to organize themselves and attempt to influence current policies. However, this is an area that would benefit from future research.

## 5.2 Political and Institutional Context

In the previous section it was made clear that there are actors within the field of pasture management that are actively seeking to change pasture management institutions and the way they work. However, in order to discuss to what extent agents seeking to create change are likely to be successful, it is necessary to consider the political and institutional context. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argue that two main characteristics affect which institutional actor that emerges as dominant, the first being whether defenders of the status quo have strong or weak veto possibilities, and the second being whether the institution allows actors to exercise a high or low degree of discretion in interpreting and enforcing institutional rules. This section discusses the political and institutional context based on observations from the conferences and interviews with livestock owners at a village level.

### *Beyond Veto Power?*

Veto possibilities are considered to be high “where there exist actors who have access to institutional and extra institutional means of blocking change”, both through formal and informal means (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010:19). If those seeking to preserve the status quo have weak veto possibilities displacement, the replacement of existing rules, to occur. However, in the event of high veto possibilities, layering is a more likely form of change. This section first discusses examples of how veto power was exercised by different agents, and then goes on to discuss the implications of this behavior.

A notable example of this relates to the allocation of land, and the issuing of land use certificates. As explained previously, the new pasture law stipulates the creation of PUAs, which have the right to lease pastureland. The distribution of land is one of the main challenges for effective pasture management and the implementation of the new law. The issue was raised by livestock owners, during the conferences and by key

informants. Key informants identified two main issues relating to the distribution of land. Firstly, the overall distribution of land is uneven and was a remnant from the land management practices of the Soviet Era, and bears little relation to current agricultural practices and land needs (Key informant 2). Secondly, they emphasized the lack of transparency of the certificates used to allocate pastureland. In some cases vast amounts of land are delegated to specific individuals or collective *dekhan* farms, regardless of the number of livestock owned (Key Informant 1).

The reluctance on behalf of government representatives to discuss the distribution of land was evident during the first conference. Some of the district representatives attending the conference overtly challenged the institutional status quo and the commitment of the government representatives present in relation to this topic. Their sentiments are best represented by the two quotes below:

*“We must think about the huge level of bureaucracy. It is not allowing municipalities to do their work, and there is no political will from your side to improve or help. You as heads of Hukumats<sup>2</sup> must review all [land use] contracts and terminate the non-transparent ones. Give the land back to pasture users, you are violating their rights!”* (Conference 1)

*“I am here as a pasture user [...] we do not have the right to use some of the land in our community because it belongs to people who do not even live there. We need training. After one training I have understood the issues, and with training we will understand and organize ourselves. We HAVE land that we CAN'T USE, this is the truth! The district heads are the ones using it.”* (Conference 1, capital letters used when participant was shouting).

In this case, the district representatives attempting to raise the issue of land certificates seem to comply most closely with the actor type described by Mahoney and Thelen as insurrectionaries – actors that do not want to comply with the institution and that overtly seek to change it. If successful in their attempt to create institutional change, insurrectionaries are frequently associated with displacement – old rules are replaced in favor of new ones. However, during the conference it became very clear that this confrontational approach was not an effective way of influencing policy makers. In response to the confrontation, the government officials present did

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<sup>2</sup> In this context *hukumat* refers to government administrative structures at district levels.

not address the any of the concerns raised by the district representatives, instead opting to discuss issues raised earlier by other participants. When prompted yet again about the issue, the parliament representative responded by aggressively asserting that those present at the conference were wrongly focusing on problems rather than solutions, and in his final statement before closing the conference again aggressively emphasized that those attending had failed to understand the law, which addressed all the concerns raised:

*“You who are here today did not read or understand this law. Please read and understand because the answers to all the questions you raised are specified there. How can we manage pastures if we ourselves do not know?”* (Conference 1).

This was a trend throughout the first pasture conference – agents who overtly challenged the existing system were consistently ignored. The refusal to candidly discuss the disproportionate allocation of pastureland echoes the fact that crucial legal issues remain undefined in the current legislation. This shows the ways in which government officials exercise their informal veto power through non-decision making to influence the type of institutional change. Because they refused to respond to the issue of land certificates, they effectively prevented it from becoming established on the agenda and from being discussed at any depth (Bacharach & Baratz, 1962). The second conference followed a similar pattern - the only national government participant, a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture, did not attend. This meant that although many issues relevant for implementation were discussed and the measures taken to proceed were agreed upon, the proposed solutions could not be verified or formally approved.

As a result, the law has done little to change the distribution of pastureland to date, and one key informant emphasizes that the law was passed quickly, without due discussion of this crucial issue:

*“The distribution of pastures to citizens is not proper. Two years ago the pasture law was in a speed process, and some issues should have been discussed further to improve the law [...] The distribution of pastures was wrong, and people working in the government receive 1000 hectares of pasture”* (Key informant 2).

The effect that the concentration of large quantities of land in the hands of a few private owners has on the functioning of the PUAs was poignantly illustrated in the statement a conference participant made when discussing the PUAs:

*“Regarding the structure of PUAs, it is easy to feel helpless. PUAs can’t do anything when resources are not allocated to them. The core is that they have no lands, and no land has been allocated to them. What is the structure for?”*  
(Conference 2).

The fact of the matter is that although the new law has made it possible for PUAs to lease land, there is very little land available for PUAs to lease.

Several representatives from international organizations were also present at the conference where land certificates were discussed. International organizations support the notion of institutional change in the area of pastures - their very involvement is a strong indicator of the desire to change, not to mention the funding of programmes intended to improve pasture management institutions, as well as the fact that the conference was organized by the international organizations in the first place. However, the discussion (or lack thereof) relating to land certificates offered an interesting backdrop to get a more nuanced idea of how the organizations position themselves in relation to different actors. Although the international organizations are clearly in favor of the new law on pastures and it is in their interest to actively seek solutions to implementation problems, the representatives of the international organizations took no public stance on the issue of land certificates. In fact, no organization representative made any direct reference to land certificates at all, nor did they address the concerns raised by district representatives. Instead making general statements suggesting the need for improvement, but without venturing into openly supporting or criticizing any specific actor. In this sense, international organizations are not openly resisting the current institutional system, but instead complying with the role of subversives, phrasing the need for change in general terms without directly responding to those who were overtly challenging the institutional status quo, and working within the system to change the system.

Relatively strong veto power also seems to permeate the institutional environment at a village level, which in turn could further affect how the laws are implemented in practice at local levels. For instance, when asked about the distribution of land to the

villages, one key informant, who comes from and lives in a village outside the capital, responded:

*“I don’t know why, but it was divided during Soviet times, and until now the same rules apply. Only livestock from our village can use it, other villages cannot. There were some issues about giving some of the saharob [village land] to other villages [...] People from [a different] community wrote a letter to the jamoat to ask for more land for their livestock, but our community did not agree. Some land has already been taken from [Village A’s] land, they came from another village and took it.”* (Interview 24)

When asked how this was possible, the response was: *“Because they have a strong leader in their community. Their leader was stronger than us, so they took it”* (Interview 24). These examples show that there is a relatively high degree of both formal and informal veto power, and indicates that informal power structures can exist independently of formal institutions.

As can be seen, there are several examples of agents exercising veto power to influence the trajectory of institutional change. Within the scope of this study, the most evident form of veto power was informal veto power. Throughout the data collection process, it became apparent that efforts to create change were frequently countered with informal efforts to prevent it. It is worth noting that this resistance to change was rarely overt, but seems to have more commonly manifested itself through non-decision making, or exploiting institutional ambiguities in order to create the desired institutional results. One of the most apparent ways in which agents appear to be exercising their veto power is by dominating the agenda, and refusing to engage in certain discussions. This was especially the case with government representatives, who simply refused to discuss certain issues that are crucial to the effective implementation of the law, in spite of the fact that these issues were recurrent in conferences.

#### *Discretion in Enforcing and Implementing Institutional Rules*

The second characteristic that can influence the relative power of actors seeking to create institutional change is the level of discretion in implementing and enforcing institutional rules – in other words, the extent to which those enforcing the rules have the power to act according to their own judgment. Change in the form of conversion and drift are less likely to occur in institutional environments that are rigid, with little

room for individual interpretation of rules. However, if the level of discretion is high, drift and conversion are more likely. In exploring this dimension of the institutional environment, the interviews with livestock owners offered a great degree of insight into the institutional environment and the agents shaping it at village levels. The institutional environment at local village levels is relevant because although the institutional framework is drafted at national levels, local authorities and the institutional environment in villages will have a significant effect on how the laws are implemented in practice.

The level of discretion in the distribution of pastureland and the enforcement of rules exercised by those in positions of authority in the village became clear when comparing responses of respondents from different villages. For instance, when asked who decides which pastureland can be used and when in village A, respondents stated:

*“The Brigadier [village manager]. He divides the land and decides which is saharob. Everybody in the village knows which land they can use”*  
(Interview 5).

*“If someone was breaking the rules or not taking care of their cows it is reported to the village manager. The manager will give him a warning the first time, and usually it doesn't happen again”* (Interview 2)

These two responses exemplify the vast majority of the answers from village A. The respondents from this village stated that the village brigadier was in charge of the common land (saharob), that everyone in the village had the right to use it, and that no fees were required. However, in other villages the situation was very different. When asked about the regulations for using the saharob and whether he/she was familiar with any new laws about pastureland, a respondent from village F stated the following:

*“No, there are no new laws, but some leaders came. We have a very small saharob, and the leaders said that they own the saharob and that if we want to use it we must pay. Now we have a saharob, but it is not used. Chinese people are building a brick factory there.”* (Interview 16)

This shows that the implementation of legal and institutional frameworks related to the management of resources can vary greatly between different villages, and that there is a high level of discretion in enforcing institutional rules. This discretion in the

enforcement of rules also appears to apply to positions of power, and which person in the village is in charge. It is worth noting that throughout the village interviews, denominations of people in power were often vague and confusing, with informants often using imprecise terminology such as “the manager”, “the government people”, or “the leaders” without specifying in what capacity they visited the village or how they were related to local or government institutions (Interview 23, 16, 21, 22). This may partly have been due to translation issues, although in many cases it seemed as if the respondents were not sure themselves. For instance, most villagers referred to the Brigadier as the village manager, stating that he was in charge. However, others took care to distinguish between the two, referring to the village manager as “*the big boss, above the brigadier, and he has more land and more cows*” (Interview 21) and “*a rich person with a lot of land*” (Interview 22). Thus, it appears that the figures with the authority to implement and enforce rules seem to vary greatly, while villagers have little insight into who is responsible for what.

The high level of discretion present at multiple institutional levels has several implications for the process of institutional change. For example, it poses risks to the effective implementation of the new pasture laws. During the second conference, this became very clear, as the fear of different *jamoats* and village leaders interpreting the rules in order to centralize and manipulate financial resources was a recurring theme. Participant expressed a fear of PUAs being subject to taxes, and being used as scapegoats for government debts. This is best summarized in the following quotes from conference participants, which also illustrate the sense of helplessness many participants seemed to feel in the face of these issues:

*“Some dekhan farms have government debts, and are ready to give land certificates to PUAs in order to avoid paying those debts. If the PUUs become legal entities, all debts will be transferred to them. The whole process is tricky, and as new legal entities, PUAs will immediately get the attention from [local] tax authorities – everyone wants their share of the cake”* (Conference 2).

*“If the PUA is registered with the jamoat, and the jamoat says ‘now you will pay taxes instead of dekhan farms’, what will we say to them?”*  
(Conference 2)

This appears to have already occurred in the case of one PUA, the head of which stated:



*“Even without economic activity we must pay tax, and every month I must pay 161 somoni<sup>3</sup>. But we have no land, and we have no economic activities or income, but the tax committee does not care” (Conference 2).*

This is clearly a problem in the establishment of PUAs, since it not only makes them vulnerable to manipulation by elites, but can also pose personal financial risks for those who establish them. With these examples in mind, it can be concluded that in addition to preservers of the status quo having a relatively high veto power, agents also exercise a high degree of discretion in interpreting and enforcing the rules. The data points to an underlying mechanism that enables these characteristics - institutional ambiguity.

#### *Institutional Ambiguity – Mechanism for Change or Manipulation?*

The data shows that veto power and discretion in the implementation of rules give rise to institutional ambiguity – but is that ambiguity a means of change or manipulation? Mahoney and Thelen argue that the creation of institutional ambiguity creates opportunities for change, as different actors can affect how rules are implemented and enforced. In theory, this could allow actors challenging the current status quo to have a significant impact on how the institution functions. However, when analyzing the data it became clear that institutional ambiguity was not a mechanism for change, but manipulation. It seems like agents seeking to counteract change exploit the ambiguity to interpret and enforce rules as a means of counteracting change.

The most notable example of this can be found in the creation and implementation of the law on pastures, and the discrepancy between its theoretical application and its application in practice. For example, on paper, the pasture law appears to create a clear structure for pasture management. However, in practice, the institutional environment regarding pastures is extremely complex. Over five institutions are involved in the management of pastureland<sup>4</sup> (Wilkes, 2014:9-10). While the law on

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<sup>3</sup> Approximately 25 USD on 18 May, 2015 (OANDA, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> These include, but are not limited to the State Committee of Land, the State Land Inspection, the Ministry of Agriculture, the State Forestry Agency, the Ministry of

pastures creates three new institutional bodies to manage pastures, it does not clarify how or through which channels these bodies should fulfill the extensive duties ascribed to them, nor does it provide a clearer division of the responsibilities among the institutions that already exist. In this sense, the law does not address one of the most critical issues – the need to clarify the institutional environment. This exacerbates ambiguity and opens spaces for agents to counteract change. The extent of how this affects the implementation of the law became clear during the second pasture management conference. The aim of the conference was to unite different stakeholders, including legal experts, to discuss the practicalities of implementing. However, the majority of the conference was dedicated to discussing whether PUAs were a legal group in the first place (Conference 2). This is a strong indicator of the uncertainty agents seeking to create change face, and how it can stall their efforts.

Furthermore, not only does the new law fail to decrease the existing ambiguity, it appears to add to it. For instance, although implementation, regulation and enforcement of the law are delegated to a government pasture agency, such an agency currently remains to be established (Wilkes, 2014:12). The law also fails to define key aspects of how the PUAs will work, most notably the legal procedure for registering them and the duties that they are expected to fulfill. For example, the law on pastures states that “*Pasture user associations should apply to the appropriate government body*” (Law on Pasture, 2013:Article 7). However, which government body is appropriate is not specified. This, in turn, creates spaces where different agents can exercise informal veto power or manipulate the interpretation and enforcement of rules to their advantage, as could be seen for instance in the allocation of resources to PUAs, or the fear of PUAs being overly taxed by local authorities. One key informant describes the situation as an “*institutional disaster*”, stating that institutions refuse to cooperate with each other (Key Informant 1). This also significantly complicates the establishment and activities of PUAs, which must interact with several institutions in order to be legally established and to receive approval for activities. The key informant states that, “*institutions bounce PUAs back and forth like balls, each not*

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Land and Water Reclamation, district governments, jamoats, primary and secondary land users (Wilkes, 2014:9-10).

*wanting to do the work or take responsibility*” (Key Informant 1). Although PUAs are accepted as legal entities, the rules for establishing and running PUAs are not clear. This provides opportunities for local authorities and elites to exercise veto power and interpret the few rules that exist in their favor – resulting in the impact of the new law on pastures being severely limited. In practice, this means that institutional ambiguity prevents the new legal framework from being fully implemented, and negatively affecting the decentralization process.

#### *From Ambiguity to Decentralization?*

The high level of institutional ambiguity has implications for the decentralization process. In addition to problems with registering PUAs, their unclear legal status limits their function as independent, decentralized units. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of downward accountability in ensuring effective decentralization through the use of user committees (Manor, 2004). The administrative structure of PUAs and their position in relation to other institutions is key to their success. According to key informants, generating trust among pasture users and convincing them that the money they invest PUAs will be used for relevant purposes is crucial:

*“The success of the PUAs is very related to the level of centralization – if they remain decentralized and the voluntary fees are used by the PUU themselves and they can see what work is being done it will work. But if higher levels of the government ask them to put it in a central fund or something like that, and it becomes more centralized, it will not work”* (Key Informant 1).

A large extent of the legal framework specifying how the new law on pastures will be implemented remains undefined. It is not clear which, if any, institutions the PUAs will be accountable to, nor is it clear whether PUAs are upwardly accountable to any ministries or community structures like *jamoats*. However, several participants in the conference expressed fears that PUAs would be made upwardly accountable, leading to increased government controls. Furthermore, the fact that the authority the government agency in charge of pastures has not yet been defined opens the possibility for layering in the form of new laws or bylaws being passed that establish it as a central, controlling actor.

This development would be in line with Manor's findings that central government officials "establish user committees at the insistence of donors but then manipulate them to their own ends by limiting their downward accountability – through the selection of committee members – and by reigning in their powers and jurisdiction" (Larson & Ribot 2004:15).

The ambiguity also exacerbates the risk of elite capture. Since the government pasture agency and responsibilities of the Commission on Pastures (CoP) has not yet been established, the full extent of their responsibilities and authority remain somewhat unclear. However, it is reported that revenue from PUAs could be used to cover the operational expenses of the CoP.

Other legal aspects also pose threats to the effective decentralization of pastures. The CoP itself represents another area of concern. It has an extremely wide range of activities, including management and monitoring functions, and it is not clear how these will be implemented in practice. Although in theory the CoP should report to district councils, donors already express concern that district governments will treat it as an implementing agency by dominating its activities, which would severely limit its role as a representative platform (Wilkes, 2014:12).

In addition to this, the unclear legal status of pastureland, and the fact that the land is officially owned by the government compounds this issue, by limiting the resources available to PUAs. One key informant comments on the allocation of land to PUAs: "*There are private lands that are untouchable, which can only be allocated to PUU by presidential decree. But this will never happen since they were made private by presidential decree in the first place*" (Key Informant 1). In other words, in practice the function of PUAs is directly dependent on the cooperation of ruling elites. At the same time, the results of this research indicate that the commitment of these elites to decentralization remains questionable.

Nonetheless, there are indications that some agents seem invested in decentralization reforms. The fact that the conferences were held at all points to some willingness to resolve these ambiguities, which can be considered a step forward in itself. It also points to the influence of international organizations, which organized them. At the

same time, the fact that the initiative to organize the conferences in order to resolve issues related to implementation was taken on behalf of international organizations rather than the government itself can also be seen as an indicator of government commitment to this reform. Furthermore, although the conferences were an important step forward, they were also limited when government representatives exercised informal veto power. The fact remains that ambiguity creates conditions where imposing controls or claims on funding from above in the form of layering or conversion are a very clear possibility.

### 5.3 A Dominant Agent Emerges?

It is clear that there are agents attempting to drive institutional change that exist simultaneously with forces trying to preserve the institutional status quo, seeking to prevent change. With this in mind, what is the likelihood that the current institutions in place for governing pastures evolve into more decentralized structures, and that the new law on pastures has the effect desired by donors? The previous sections have shown that agents within the system exercise a relatively high degree of veto possibilities, while there is also a high level of discretion in enforcing the rules. As can be seen in figure 4, this suggests that the type of agent most likely to emerge as dominant is *parasitic symbionts*. Parasitic symbionts are agents that exploit institutions for private gain, and are generally associated with institutional change in the form of *drift*.

Figure 4. A Dominant Agent Emerges

	<b>Low Level of Discretion</b>	<b>High Level of Discretion</b>
<b>Strong Veto Possibilities</b>	Subversives <i>Layering</i>	<b>Parasitic Symbionts</b> <i>Drift</i>
<b>Weak Veto Possibilities</b>	Insurrectionaries <i>Displacement</i>	Opportunists <i>Conversion</i>

Source: The author, adapted from Mahoney & Thelen 2010:19.

The high level of discretion in interpreting and enforcing institutional rules as a result of the ambiguity present in the current legislation provides multiple opportunities for agents within the institutional system to manipulate it in their favor. Although no actors were directly observed acting as parasitic symbionts, this is hardly surprising given that this behavior is likely to be covert. Due to the complexity of the institutional system surrounding pastures, and the multitude of agencies that are involved in their implementation, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where parasitic symbionts may emerge, making it all the more difficult to address. It is not unreasonable to assume that they can be present at both local and national levels. Some of the areas particularly vulnerable to the entrance of parasitic symbionts indicated in this analysis include the distribution of land certificates, which lacks transparency, and local tax authorities, which seem to seek means of increasing profit by taxing PUAs. However, parasitic symbionts could also be active on smaller and less noticeable scales. For instance, during the conference a 10-step process for registering PUAs was presented, in which the approximate cost of the required legal documents was outlined. However, the cost of different documents varied greatly between different regions, with one conference participant reporting that he paid 350 somoni for a legal document estimated to cost 80 somoni<sup>5</sup> (Conference 2). This indicates that the current institutional environment is vulnerable to manipulation and elite capture even at local levels. The potential consequences of this finding are illustrated by the fact that institutional drift in favor of old elites appears to be occurring at the expense of rural households, particularly with regard to the distribution of pastureland.

This result also leads to the question of whether the refusal to discuss certain issues, especially the distribution of pastureland, is truly only about veto power? The reluctance to discuss land distribution is not simply a case of government agents exercising their power, but rather that it points to a form of institutional change –

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<sup>5</sup> 350 somoni and 80 somoni correspond to values of approximately 55 USD and 12 USD, respectively on May 18, 2015 (OANDA, 2015).

drift. External circumstances, like the distribution and ownership of livestock, and the structure of the agricultural sector, with households rather than collective *dekhan* farms as the dominant unit of production, have changed drastically. Yet, the institutional framework and allocation of resources remains extremely similar to the Soviet era. In fact, two thirds of all pastures in Tajikistan remain allocated to *dekhan* farms, while the remaining third is under the control of agricultural enterprises. This, in spite of the fact that cooperative farms account for less than 3% of the national value of livestock production (Lerman, 2012:174). The failure to adjust the distribution of land to the changing external circumstances is a case of institutional drift, which has interesting implications. In his study of agrarian reform in Tajikistan, Rowe concludes that “[l]ike the government itself, the presidents and directors of the farm laborers’ cooperatives, in most cases, are the same men and women who were in these posts under the Soviet regime, and have carried over into the new system” (2010:191). The distribution of resources continues to favor, and is likely to some extent still controlled by, an old system of elites. This could explain the reluctance of some institutional agents to critically assess or discuss this issue. Addressing the mismatch of resources could even constitute a direct threat to the income or political support of those controlling the institutions. In sum, the decentralization of pasture governance and the redistribution of pastureland through PUAs are taking place in the form of *layering*, albeit on a small scale. However, it is being directly counteracted by institutional of *drift*.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that the creation of the new law on pastures has created ambiguity in the interpretation and enforcement of the law, and thus opened a space in which different actors have the possibility to influence the decentralization process. Considering that the new law on pastures was passed fairly recently, it remains too early to state conclusively what effect it has had or will have on pasture management in Tajikistan. However, the analysis clearly shows that there are many obstacles to overcome in order for the legislation to be implemented successfully. One of them is the ambiguity present throughout the phrasing and implementation of the institutional framework at both national and local levels. Agents that seek to prevent change are exploiting the leeway created by the ambiguity to a greater extent than those who seek to create it.

This ambiguity that exists not just in the procedure to establish PUAs, but also in their structure and their internal organization also opens the doors for manipulating the PUAs in favor of local authorities or elites, or excluding certain groups both avertedly and inadvertently. For instance, during one of the conferences a participant proposed imposing a rule that only households with more than 5 livestock should be allowed to register. However, this type of rule would severely limit the scope of the PUA as the majority of households have very small livestock herds, often no more than two or three animals. Furthermore, the procedures by which chairmen and secretaries will be appointed have not been specified, which opens doors for regulations to be imposed from above.

This calls the efforts of agents seeking change, particularly international organizations, into question. In addition to veto power and the level of discretion in enforcing the rules, Mahoney and Thelen also stress that how agents interact with other institutions and which coalitions they align themselves in may also influence which actor emerges as dominant. With large NGOs acting as subversives and publically aligning themselves with the government while outright opposition is all but completely ignored, there is little support for those opposing the system. At the same time there is an abundance of opportunities to for those who benefit from the system to hinder the change within the institutions, making the type of change desired by subversives or insurrectionaries unlikely.

However, this does not mean that international organizations have no means of influencing the trajectory of institutional change. The high level of discretion in enforcing institutional rules, as well as the ambiguities in the legislation, are indeed creating spaces for dialogue and debate between different actors, which in itself could be seen as an improvement. Furthermore, although it may be difficult to influence institutions at a national level, the high level of discretion exercised by local governing bodies that makes enforcement of the legislation difficult may also provide opportunities for NGOs to exert a more significant degree of influence on institutional change in villages.

Nonetheless, in spite of these possibilities, this is only likely to occur where international organizations have a strong enough presence over a consistent amount of



time in order to influence village-level institutions in a long-term lasting manner. In areas where NGOs are not present, there seems to be a high likelihood of *jamoats* and village authorities are only likely to comply with the law to its utmost extent if it is directly in line with their interests, or if it at least does not directly contradict them. This is similar to Andersson and Ostrom's finding that "only local politicians who face positive incentives are likely to respond to decentralization reforms by making the required investments" (2008:81). The fact remains that the institutional ambiguities remain so many that even if there are no actors directly counteracting change at local levels, enforcing the legislation remains a significant challenge.

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

This study has discussed how different agents shape institutional change in Tajikistan, and ultimately how it is affecting the process of decentralization within pasture management institutions. An analysis of data in the form of field notes, interviews with key informants and livestock owners and a desk review of pasture management legislation reveals that although there are agents actively seeking to create change, notably international organizations and parts of the government itself, there are also agents that seem to seek ways to contradict it. A combination of strong formal and informal veto power and a high level of discretion in the implementation and enforcement of institutional rules make it difficult for subversives and insurrectionaries to create real change, particularly at local levels. Furthermore, the current institutional environment surrounding pasture management institutions is characterized by a high degree of institutional ambiguity, which rather than allowing agents seeking to create change in the form of decentralization, increases the opportunities for actors seeking to preserve the status quo and agents acting as parasitic symbionts to exploit ambiguities to their benefit, contributing to institutional drift. This makes the effective decentralization of pasture management institutions in Tajikistan unlikely, and increases the risk of elite capture.

Apart from giving some insight into how the decentralization process in Tajikistan is affected by the institutional environment, these findings have interesting implications for international organizations, which are prominent both as agents seeking to create

change as well as donors. Firstly, it implies that much of the funding put toward institutional development and change appears to be producing only cosmetic changes. Secondly, within this context international organizations are acting as subversives, seeking to change the system without outright opposing it or challenging the ruling elites.

Rowe, in line with Meynen and Doornbos, also suggests that pressure from international organizations to decentralize and privatize, for instance in order to get loans, may complicate transition processes (2010:192). Countries like Tajikistan with limited economic resources may not have the institutional or economic capacity to implement effective reforms, instead opting for largely cosmetic changes in order to secure international approval (Rowe, 2010; Meynen & Doornbos, 2004). This is in line with an observation made by Nakata, who during her research of the peace building process after the conflict in Tajikistan observed that international aid in the early years after the war not only lacked transparency, but that the focus on liberalization and policy reform rather than long-term peace building created opportunities for ruling elites to legalize their ownership of strategic assets while further excluding opposing parties and actors (Nakaya, 2009:263). With this in mind, it is worth considering whether international organizations to some extent are enabling the manipulation of a weak institutional system, partly by providing funding, but also by complying to the unwritten rule that certain issues, such as the allocation of pasture land, are not up for discussion - in turn extending a degree of legitimacy to processes that are ultimately vague and which lack transparency.

It is also important to recognize that although the use of Mahoney and Thelen's model has provided insight into *some* of the factors affecting institutional change in Tajikistan, this does not mean that *all* the factors were captured in this study. It is likely that there are complexities within the institutional environment as well as agents within the institutional system at both national and local levels that this study did not detect. For instance, the power dynamics within villages and between villages and national government authorities in Tajikistan is an area that would benefit from further research, as would a more thorough study of the informal power mechanisms within government institutions. Furthermore, the long-term impact of recent legislation and reforms remain uncertain, and future studies of their direct impact at

village levels, as well as how they are seen by livestock owners, *dekhan* farms and PUAs could yield interesting results.

Nonetheless, the question remains whether this small, mountainous and landlocked country will be able to disrupt the cycle of land overuse and poverty that is threatening its development. Rural households in Tajikistan face an uncertain future if pasture quality continues to decline. Will livestock owners emerge as agents of institutional change in their own right, or will the degradation of pastures continue to go unchecked? Perhaps Verbugge is correct in stating that “[t]he most important effects of decentralization may not necessarily lie in its sudden impact on institutional arrangements, but in the creation of long-term institutional ambiguity, which carries the seeds of incremental institutional change” (2015:251). Let us only hope that it is change in a sustainable direction.

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## Appendix I: Record of Conferences

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
1	2014-12-02	Round-Table Discussion of Pasture Laws	Approximately 60 participants, including district representatives, representatives from the ministry of agriculture, a representative from parliament, and representatives from international organizations. The discussion was chaired by the representative of parliament. The conference was held in Tajik, and the overall mood was lively with some discussions turning heated.
2	2014-12-19	Pasture Network Conference	Approximately 20 participants, including representatives from NGOs, international organizations, technical experts and a few district representatives. A representative from the Ministry of Agriculture was invited but did not attend. The conference was described as a platform for sharing ideas.

## Appendix II: Record of Respondents

### Key Informant Interviews

Nr.	Date	Gender	Field of Work
1	2014-12-20	Female	Pasture Management Advisor
2	2015-01-16	Male	Agronomic Specialist, previously in charge of implementing a pasture management project

### Livestock Owner Interviews

Nr.	Date	Gender	Village	Number of Livestock
1	2014-12-20	Female	Village A	3 cattle
2	2014-12-20	Female	Village A	5 cattle, 4 goats, 12 sheep
3	2014-12-20	Male	Village A	3 cattle
4	2014-12-20	Male	Village A	10 cattle, 30 sheep
5	2014-12-27	Male	Village A	16 cattle
6	2014-12-27	Male		4 cattle
7	2014-12-27	Female	Village A	8 cattle, 14 goats, 20 sheep
8	2014-12-27	Female	Village A	8 cattle, 10 sheep, 10 goats
9	2014-12-27	Male	Village A	8 cattle
10	2014-12-27	Male	Village B	3 cattle
11	2014-12-27	Female	Village C	2 cattle
12	2014-12-28	Female	Village D	11 cattle, 2 sheep, 3 goats
13	2014-12-28	Male	Village A	5 cattle, 10 goats, 10 sheep
14	2014-12-28	Male	Village A	3 cattle
15	2014-12-28	Male	Village E	4 cattle, 40 sheep
16	2014-12-28	Female	Village F	3 cattle, 2 sheep
17	2014-12-28	Male	Village G	3 cattle
18	2015-01-05	Male	Village H	18 cattle, 100 sheep, 50 goats, 12 horses
19	2015-01-05	Female	Village I	1 cattle, 3 sheep, 3 goats
20	2015-01-08	Male	Village J	28 cattle
21	2015-01-08	Female	Village K	2 cattle
22	2015-01-08	Female	Village L	2 cattle, 2 sheep
23	2015-01-08	Female	Village M	3 cattle
24	2015-01-08	Male	Village A	4 cattle

## **Appendix III: Interview Guide, Key Informants**

### **Interview Protocol:**

- Explain purpose of the study
- Explain how the data will be used
- Explain structure of interview
- Ask for consent and approval from respondent to record written notes
- Express that the respondent is free to leave any time
- Express that the respondent may refrain from answering any questions
- Guarantee anonymity of respondent

### **Guiding questions and talking points:**

- 1) Can you tell me more about what you do, what you work with?
- 2) Can you briefly explain how pasture management works in Tajikistan?
- 3) How does it work at village levels?
- 4) How much influence do local, “village-level” organizations have formally and in practice?
- 5) Which are the key decision-makers/actors involved?
- 6) What do you think the main challenges for livestock owners are in the future?
- 7) How would you describe the relationship between the government and pasture users?

**- Thank the respondent for taking the time -**

## Appendix IV: Interview Guide, Livestock Owners

### Interview Protocol:

- Explain purpose of the study
- Explain how the data will be used
- Explain structure of interview
- Ask for consent and approval from respondent to record written notes
- Express that the respondent is free to leave any time
- Express that the respondent may refrain from answering any questions
- Guarantee anonymity of respondent

### Guiding questions and talking points:

#### General Information

1. How many people live in your household?
2. What is your main source of income?
3. What are your main expenditures?

#### Livestock Inventory

4. Which types of livestock/animals do you keep and how many?
5. How do they contribute to your household (e.g. income, food)?
6. Who in the household is mainly responsible for the keeping and well-being of livestock?

#### Pasture Use

7. Can you briefly describe how you care for your animals?
8. Approximately how many ha of pasture do you use/have access to?
  - a. In the summer? Winter?
  - b. Is the amount of pasture land you can use stable from year to year?
9. Which type of land is it? (e.g. common land, own land, rented land)
10. Do you pay for the use of pasture land (e.g. taxes, rent fees)?
  - a. How much/about what percentage of your income?
11. Are there enough pastures/feed for your livestock? How about for the town in general?
12. Have you ever struggled to find enough hay/fodder/grass to feed your livestock? How did you deal with this?
13. Have you ever cooperated with other livestock owners in the community to herd animals together, or share the pasture land? What were your reasons for doing this?

#### Pasture Management

14. Who/what decides which pastures you can use and when?
  - a. How is the decision made?
15. If someone has a problem with their pasture land, or the amount of pasture they can use, who do they discuss it with?
16. Are there any groups or organizations in the community that discuss the use of pastures/keeping of livestock where pasture users are members?
17. How do you distinguish between “your” pasture land and others’ pastureland?

- a. Would you say these boundaries are clear?
- 18. Are there any rules about using pasture land in the community (e.g. the number of animals per hectare, times of the year pastures may be used, certain boundaries etc.)?
  - a. What happens if someone breaks one of these rules? Some more serious than others?
- 19. Are you aware of any new laws relating to pastures and pasture use?
  - a. If so, how do they affect you?
- 20. Have there been any conflicts in the community related to the use of pastures, division of animals?
  - a. If so, how were they resolved?

### Infrastructure

- 21. Do you use any vaccines or other medicines to treat your animals on a regular basis?
  - a. Are these services provided by the government, or privately?
- 22. Is there any government support for people who lose their animals, e.g. due to cold weather, disease, etc.?
- 23. Do you do anything to maintain the pastures you use, e.g. plant more grass, build fences, etc.?
- 24. Do your animals stay in one place throughout the year, or do you use different pastures?
- 25. Have you ever used a pasture more than a days travel from the home, or a pasture in a different district? Why did you/did you not decide to do this?
  - a. Is this something you would have liked to do if you had the opportunity?
  - b. Why or why not?
  - c. If so, were any veterinary controls necessary?

### Future Plans

- 26. Do you think keeping livestock is a good occupation? Why or why not?
- 27. What is the most difficult thing with being a livestock owner?
- 28. For how long do you think you can use these pastures?
- 29. How do you think that your income/benefits from livestock could improve (e.g. more animals, access to markets)?
- 30. What do you think your life will look like in 5 years? 10 years?
- 31. What would you like to achieve in the next 5-10 years?
- 32. Do you feel confident about your future?

**- Thank the respondent for taking the time -**