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## Briefs

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### Difficulties of Conducting Field Research in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Serkan Yalçın, Lecturer, Department of Management, International Ataturk Alatoo University, serkany@iaau.edu.kg, and İbrahim Keleş, Lecturer, Department of Management, International Ataturk Alatoo University, Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, qelesh@iaau.edu.kg

In this research brief we discuss the difficulties we encountered while conducting research between March and July 2003. The research investigated dimensions of foreign direct investments (FDI) in two former Soviet Union (FSU) countries: Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>1</sup>

The study represents a test of John Dunning's famous Ownership-Location-Internalization (OLI) Paradigm or Eclectic Theory of FDI (Dunning 1980, 1988). The research examined FDI in two FSU countries by focusing mainly on host country factors to attract foreign investments, company-specific factors that enable a company to make an overseas investment, and non-standard business practices — i.e., corruption — which significantly affect company performances. In this research, we attempted to find region-specific FDI variables. For this, we investigated host country and company-related FDI dimensions in the region. We identified six companies that made considerable foreign investments in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The companies represented a number of sectors, including glass packing, dairy processing and plastic

products. Large international firms providing infrastructure, such as electricity and gas, and those extracting natural resources were excluded since the host country government imposes restrictions on their business practices.

In our research the intended data collection method was to use mailed questionnaires, as is done in most business field research. In both countries a total of 250 questionnaires were sent to selected companies (125 in each country), which were contacted using personal references through our universities and local business associations. However, after two months we had not received a single completed questionnaire, despite our initial contacts with several companies before sending the questionnaires and follow-up calls afterwards.

Clearly we had to modify our data collection method, but we could not afford to administer another set of questionnaires (not that another round would apparently do any good). We decided to implement a "case study" approach instead and conduct interviews. However, after making initial contacts, we were surprised to find that the companies were unwilling to give appointments to academics. We were later informed by local experts that companies do not give appointments easily, and even when they do they do not give out much information about themselves. Fortunately, we were

<sup>1</sup> It was supported by the International Black Sea University (Tbilisi), Penta Advertising Co. (Tbilisi), Tbilisi Turkish Businessmen's Association, International Ataturk Alatoo University (Bishkek), and the Kyrgyz-Turk Businessmen's Association (Bishkek).

at last able to get some appointments through a network of several key personal acquaintances. But our nightmare was not yet over, as we encountered one manager who refused the interview without reason after we were already in his office. In another company the person only filled out 1/5 of the questionnaire. We must point out that we have conducted similar research in Turkey, where we encountered none of these difficulties. Companies in the FSU are not accustomed to being examined in academic studies and this may explain their reticence in talking to us. We recommend that scholars conducting similar research be prepared for these kinds of difficulties when studying businesses in the FSU.

A preliminary result of our research is a change of focus: instead of the strictly quantitative statistical analysis that we had planned, we were able to make qualitative conclusions about cultural issues of doing business in the host countries. This

allowed us to enlarge the scope of our research, especially for information related to corruption. For further information concerning our study, research questions or questionnaire, please feel free to contact Mr. Serkan Yalçın at [serkany@iaau.edu.kg](mailto:serkany@iaau.edu.kg). This research will be presented at the conference: "Central Asia — Perspectives from the Field" to be held November 7-8, 2003 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

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### Research Conditions in Uzbekistan: Archival Access and Conditions in Samarkand

Christine Evans, Ph.D. student, Department of History, University of California, Berkeley, Calif., USA, [ceevans@socrates.berkeley.edu](mailto:ceevans@socrates.berkeley.edu)

Gaining access to Uzbekistan's archives requires a good deal of patience and advance planning. The process took five of the eight weeks I spent in Summer 2003 in Uzbekistan on an exploratory research trip funded by the American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS). The Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs' United States Bureau, which is responsible for granting permission to American scholars, officially requires a letter of introduction from the US Embassy. As of July, however, the Embassy had not heard of this requirement, and ultimately refused to provide such a letter for me. Fortunately, this rule seems to be negotiable, since I ultimately obtained permission to work in the Samarkand province State Archive [*Samarqand davlat arxiv*] on the basis of a letter of support from the Tashkent ACTR office (with help from Foreign Ministry contacts). It is worth noting that, in hopes of minimizing questions about my very preliminary research, I had applied with a vague project title — "Socialism and Modernization in Post-War Samarkand" (a more controversial topic might have caused additional delays). Samarkand

archive staff indicated that Uzbek archives are self-financing and that I would be charged a fee as part of the application process, but I could not confirm whether money ever changed hands on my behalf. Permission, once granted, is good for a year, after which time one must reapply.

Once I was in, working conditions were challenging at best. Uzbekistan's provincial archives are in a state of crisis due to the collapse of government financing and public utilities. In Samarkand the archive building did not have consistent running water or electricity, much less climate control. Bundles of yellowing papers were strewn across the floor of a storage room. Although the archive staff were helpful, a variety of discomforts — including the 100+ degree (Fahrenheit) summer heat — made rapid progress difficult. The reading room performed double duty as the staff meeting room and break room, and was occasionally filled with smoke from garbage burning in the field behind the archive building. Summer maintenance and preparations for a visit to Samarkand by Russian President Vladimir Putin

were also disruptive: archive staff were frequently unavailable to retrieve material from the stacks because they were required to paint, clean, and weed the surrounding gardens during day-long *subbotniki* (days of supposedly voluntary labor).

Another potential obstacle for foreign researchers is the post-independence decision to catalogue the significant backlog of material from the Soviet period primarily or exclusively in Uzbek, making Uzbek language skills increasingly necessary. Stacks of Soviet-era photographs, for

example, that were being catalogued while I was there were being identified solely in Uzbek. Archive staff attributed this in part to the fact that new entry-level employees are no longer fluent in Russian — and with monthly salaries at approximately \$14, many lack higher education as well. Conditions in Uzbekistan's archives reflect the country's general crisis of public finance and education, making meaningful improvements unlikely in the near future.

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## Library Conditions in Uzbekistan

**Shoshana Keller**, Associate Professor, History Department, Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y., USA, [skeller@hamilton.edu](mailto:skeller@hamilton.edu)

This report derives from my field trip to Uzbekistan in summer of 2003 for a project tentatively titled, "Teaching History, Teaching the Nation." This project is about teaching Uzbek history in elementary and high schools in the 1950s and 1960s, and how creating the Uzbek historical narrative was an important tool in creating a Soviet Uzbek national identity.

The state of libraries in Uzbekistan is deteriorating alarmingly. In late spring 2003, the Uzbek government began to demolish the Alisher Navoiy State Library in Tashkent to make way for more government office buildings. The decision apparently happened with little forewarning to the librarians. The library's five million volume collection is now divided between two buildings. The main building is on Xorazm Street, very close to the new British Westminster University (located at 12 Oxunboboev Street). A researcher must go to the main building first to obtain a reader's card, which requires presenting one's passport, residency registration, and letter of introduction from the host research institution. The library card catalogue is also in the Xorazm Street building. However, some 80 percent of the collection is in storage at 33 Sulaymonova Street, near metro Mustaqilliq Maidoni, and cannot be accessed from the main building. The next step is to present one's card and the necessary call numbers at 33 Sulaymonova, and hope that the books, newspapers or journals are actually available. The people working at the storage building try to be helpful, but they have a mess on their hands. For the first few months after the

transfer the entire collection was wrapped and tied in small bundles piled floor to ceiling in rooms and hallways. The "newspaper room" consisted of stacks of bound newspapers on the floor of what looked like a high school gymnasium in more-or-less alphabetical order, requiring that one step on some newspapers in order to reach others. In late July the newspapers were moved onto shelves in their own building within the 33 Sulaymonova complex. Similarly the librarians have been unwrapping the books and placing them on shelves as quickly as possible, but it is going to take months, if not an entire year, before that process is complete. In the meantime large sections of the collection are unavailable. The only reason that the librarians looked for my books at all was because I was a foreign "guest," and then they could find only three out of the nine books I requested. There is no climate control in the buildings, from what I could see the space for shelving is inadequate, and it is all too easy for materials to get lost in the chaos. One librarian told me that no funds for a new central library building have been allocated, so this situation is likely to continue for years. There are rumors that librarians at the Navoiy and the Academy of Sciences Fundamental Library are selling the more valuable books under the table to supplement their inadequate salaries, but I was unable to confirm anything.

In addition to these problems, some libraries are purging Russian-language and/or Soviet-era material to make room for new Uzbek-language materials. I encountered this problem in the library

of the Nizomi Tashkent State Pedagogical University, and John Schoeberlein has reported a similar purge in the Ferghana Provincial Library. While some libraries are now boasting on-line

catalogues and other computer resources, courtesy of Western grant agencies, they are allowing their collections to decay.