Urban Activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia

Strategies and Practices

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Introduction

Urban Activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia: Overcoming Distances

Tsypylma Darieva, Carola S. Neugebauer

Urban protest movements and various forms of citizen participation in urban development have become part of mainstream culture in Western societies.[1] The slogan 'The Right to the City' is as widespread and rooted as artist activity in urban public spaces or resident engagement in their neighbourhoods. All these forms of 'urban activism' are covered by broad public attention and scholarly research. Urban activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, in contrast, broadly escapes attention and nuanced discussions. A simplistic view of weak, passive and scared citizens in Eastern European and Eurasian cities still prevails in the Western public,[2] ignoring the vibrantly evolving landscape of urban actors, initiatives, activities and claims to spaces. Indeed, the reality of these urban spaces is much more complex. Similar to other parts of the world, dynamic and fluid new forms of civic initiatives are emerging and gaining a significant presence in Eurasia's social and political debates.[3] Localised forms of protest and small-scale activities stand next to mass movements that deploy the potential of structural change in urban life,[4] predominantly shaped by neoliberal urbanism and authoritarian regimes. Urban activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia challenges the established interplays of the (local) state and private business by activities in arenas such as urban planning, arts and education.

Growing academic interest in Eastern European grassroots initiatives and urban movements tries to capture the evolving diversity, even though blind spots have remained: studies often focus more on the EU-integrated, post-socialist part of Europe, neglecting urban activism in the former Soviet Union. They are also often ignorant of activism in the geographical peripheries, such as small- and medium-sized cities. Moreover, studies often lack an interdisciplinary stance sensitive to different arenas of activism as well as to its specific urban contexts marked by (post-) socialist legacies and neoliberal-authoritarian tendencies. In particular, the return of the authoritarian centralist state in the post-Soviet region together with the shift to neoliberalism seems to leave little room for expressions of civil society, alternative urban developments, and individual engagement that is able to 'run counter to a given strategy'.[5] Yet different urban forces – particularly urban activists – struggle implicitly or explicitly for the right to the city in Eurasia. These points are of great interest. They urge us to tackle the actual shortcomings of knowledge and perception, which stem from multiple

1 Fahlenbrach, Kathrin, et al., *Perspectives and Motivations, Protest Cultures. A Companion*, in Fahlenbrach, Kathrin, et al. (eds), *Berghahn* (London, 2016), pp. 2–9.

2 Jacobsson, Kerstin, Jacobsson, Kerstin, Saxonberg, Steven, *Social Movements in Post-Communist Europe and Russia* (London, 2015).

3 Youngs, Richard, *Civic Activism Unleashed. New Hope or False Dawn for Democracy?* (Oxford, 2019).

4 By 'urban' we mean a transformation not only of physical environment and infrastructure, but also social domains of participating and everyday practices of appropriating a place. (Low, 2006).

5 Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991).

distances. These include the distance between Western narratives and Eastern European experiences, the distance between public debates and the multidisciplinary, yet paralleled discourses in academia as well as the distance between the local stakeholders of urban life and development. This volume hopes to overcome some of these multiple divisions and attract the attention of a broader audience to the contentious elements of urban life in post-Soviet countries. Moreover, we aim at fostering interdisciplinary discussions about urban activism and social change in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, advancing scholarly debates. In doing so, the volume considers a fundamental question: to whom does the urban space in post-Soviet cities belong? It asks in particular: What is urban activism in the post-Soviet realm? What are its distinctive features? Who are urban activists and what are they striving for? How do they contest urban spatial and societal transformations? How do they mobilise, self-organise, cooperate and, thus, overcome isolation and post-Soviet mistrust in collective actions? What are the opportunities and constraints, as well as the risks of urban activism in post-Soviet, Eastern European and Eurasian cities that seek to bring about structural urban change?

These questions popped up in a variety of projects that preceded this book-endeavour. The workshop 'Urban Pioneers in Eastern Europe', organised by the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS) in Berlin in cooperation with the Centre for Independent Social Research (CISR e.V. Berlin), gave one important impulse to this volume. The Berlin workshop[6] addressed the meaning of rising individual and so-called non-professional urban activism in Eastern Europe by gathering not only scholars, but also practitioners and experts from the field of applied science. As a result, members of the research project 'Shifting paradigms – Towards participatory and effective urban planning in Germany, Russia and Ukraine'[7] joined the book project. This research project explored the local concepts and practices of urban planning linked to publicly contested projects of urban renewal in cities of regional importance in Ukraine, Russia and Germany. The interdisciplinary and comparative analysis of all stakeholders and interactions in planning conflicts underlined the relevance of the book's key questions. As editors of this volume, we also invited a broad spectrum of contributions in order to provide a diverse set of perspectives, as well as

6 The workshop Overcoming the Distance: Urban Pioneers in Eastern Europe took place on 23 October 2018 followed by a ZOIS Forum discussion. See <https://www.zois-berlin.de/veranstaltungen/archiv-2018/workshop-urban-pioneers/>

7 Funded by Volkswagen Foundation (Nov. 2016–Nov. 2018)

an interim analysis of the distinctive experiences of urban activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. The volume thus provides insights into different forms of urban activism that have emerged in numerous sites and localities, covering not only capital cities, but also small cities and agglomerations in Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Lithuania. The volume displays a variety of small- and large-scale urban activism ranging from 'urban pioneering' in the city of Kovdor/ Murmansk Oblast to recent mass protest movements in Yerevan (Armenia). It compiles ten scholarly reports from the often-distant fields of anthropology, sociology, urban planning and political science. Moreover, the volume tries to bridge the transdisciplinary gap, therefore combining academic analysis with primary reports and materials: four interviews with local activists from Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, six photo reports and numerous additional photographs, which offer first-hand insights into the experiences and contexts of urban activism in post-Soviet societies.

In doing so, we build on a broad understanding of urban activism. We understand urban activism as city-oriented individual and collective action and grassroots engagement initiated by citizens that relates to urban space as an 'object of contestation', 'mobilisation space' and a 'scene of contestation',[8] circling around the goals of 'collective consumption (or public infrastructure), cultural identity and political self-management'.[9] Urban activism – according to our understanding – may thus range from an individual one-time micro-action on the level of everyday life to urban movements as collective actions based on an urban identity, 'common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with the elites'.[10] On the one hand, we thus build our understanding of urban activism on a scholarly definition of 'urban movements'.[11] On the other hand, we broaden the concept of urban movements and call it 'urban activism'. Added aspects are, firstly, that we consider individual actions in addition to the current focus on collective actions. Secondly, we consider the urban self-identity and solidarity of a group not constitutive of urban activism, but for its relation to urban spaces in one of the aforementioned ways. Moreover, thirdly, we detach urban activism from its outcome. Though urban activists sometimes strive for 'achieving structural change',[12] we do not include the capacity and outcomes of civic actions in the definition of urban activism. We consider this widening

8 Gestring, Norbert, Ruhne, Renate, and Wehrheim, Jan (eds), *Stadt und soziale Bewegungen* (Wiesbaden, 2014), pp. 7–21.

9 Jacobsson, Kerstin 'Introduction: The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe', in Jacobsson, Kerstin (ed.), *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, (London, 2015), p. 7.

10 Ibid.

11 e.g. Castells, Manuel, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley, 2015).

12 Jacobsson, Kerstin 'Introduction: The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe', in Jacobsson, Kerstin (ed.), *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, (London, 2015), p. 7.

of concept and broad understanding of urban activisms as essential to capture the evolving creativity and diversity of civic engagement 'for' or 'against' change in urban life in Eastern European and Eurasian cities. In the following, we demonstrate briefly the richness and value of the materials compiled in this volume. In particular, we highlight three points, which shine through the book's contributions and that we consider valuable for broader attention and scholarly debate related to the region: (i) neoliberalism and authoritarian tendencies as distinctive features of post-Soviet settings are for urban activism both a challenge and an opportunity; (ii) urban activism in the post-Soviet realm is more than the plurality of practices and organisational forms, but a dynamically evolving and flexible pattern of practices (tactics and strategies), ambitions (claims) and networked civic actors, constantly 'learning', adapting, resisting and contesting the actual urban regimes; (iii) urban pioneers drive the dynamism and flexibility of activism in Eastern European and Eurasian cities.

Regimes of Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Neoliberalism and authoritarianism are predominant trends in the former Soviet Union, shaping urban development and urbanites to various degrees. Neoliberalism opens an examination of parallels between western and post-socialist cities and activisms. Following the global trend of neoliberalisation as an ideology[13] and pattern of market-oriented restructuring,[14] the privatisation, commercialisation and securitisation of public spaces constitute highly contested issues in Western and Eastern European cities and beyond. In Eastern Europe and Eurasia, citizens have faced radical urban restructuring since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Here not only urban public spaces, but also semi-private spaces, housing, courtyards and recreational spaces are increasingly occupied by the power of the city's 'growth machine' and market commodity principles[15] which provide wealth and power for the governmental and economic elites. Among the most profound examples of neoliberal policies and dramatic urban changes are the construction of giant shopping malls and monolith parking lots instead of children's playgrounds, the demolition of historical buildings, the lack and overuse of neighbourhood infrastructures and vanishing green space. There is much tension

13 Laze, Alban, 'Municipal Governments in Post-Socialist Urban Governance', in Eckhardt, Frank, and Elander, Ingemar (eds), *Urban Governance in Europe* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 279–313.

14 Peck, Jeremy, Theodore, Nik, and Brenner, Neil, 'Neoliberal Urbanism: Models, Moments, Mutations', *SAIS Review*, 2009, vol. xxix, no. 1, pp. 49–66.

15 Molotch, Harvey, 'The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place', *American Journal of Sociology*, 1976, vol. 82, no. 2, pp. 309–332; Valiyev, Anar, 'The Post-Communist Growth Machine: The Case of Baku, Azerbaijan', *Cities*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2016), pp. 45–53.

in the way urban spaces are used and transformed in everyday life. As a result, civic urban 'spontaneous' protests increased as Andrei Semenov shows in this volume. According to his survey (2012–2014), 17% of all protests in autocratic Russia relate to urban activism in this vein, and half of it has no organisational structure.

At the same time, urban development and activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia are marked by a set of specific features – features that refer to (post-) Soviet legacies (e.g. informal institutions such as beliefs, habits and routines) and traits of authoritarianism. With regard to the latter, we have to recall the difficult political context in this region. After mass demonstrations and 'occupy movements' in Moscow between 2011 and 2013,[16] public spaces (squares and streets) in Russia became subject to heavy restrictions and legislative measures approved by the State Duma (parliament), significantly limiting freedom of speech, actions and being in the public in Russia (Fröhlich in this volume).[17] In 2015, the Russian authorities introduced the 'Foreign Agent Law', restricting NGOs' and non-profit organisations in their political and public activities and forcing local activists to search for other tactics and strategies. An explicitly non-democratic imposition of the post-Soviet form of rule in regard to collective actions and gatherings in urban spaces can be observed in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Public space in these areas became an arena of threats and violent repressions (Nazaket Azimli in this volume),[18] differing from the situation in Georgia and Armenia where there is still room for collective civic actions and expression of public voices. These hostile contexts embed, challenge and also provoke urban activism today, as we will argue below.

However, neither authoritarian power, nor neoliberalism are mere recent experiences in post-Soviet societies. They have been rather long-standing and tightly interwoven since the Soviet collapse in 1991. Neoliberal authoritarianism and corrupt centralism led to especially aggressive privatisation and unpredictable construction booms. After the decades of centralised planning run by political elites and professionals with the aim of socio-economic modernisation and public welfare in the Soviet Union, the state suddenly withdrew largely from envisioning the social-material future of the cities. Neoliberal ideology and practices started to spread across the post-Soviet states after 1991 and urban development was detached from planning, so that the dominant political-economic

16 Bikbov, Alexander, 'The Methodology of Studying "Spontaneous" Street Activism (Russian Protests and Street Camps, December 2011–July 2012)', *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research*, vol. 2 (2012), pp. 130–163; Gabowitsch, Mischa, *Protest in Putin's Russia* (Cambridge, 2017).

17 Zhelina, Anna '"Hanging Out", Creativity, and Right to the City: Urban Public Space in Russia Before and After the Protest Wave of 2011–12', *Stasis*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2014), pp. 228–259.

18 Schieck, Sebastian, *Kasachstans autoritäre Partizipationspolitik* (Berlin, 2019).

elites excluded residents from any co-decision-making in urban issues. Mistrust, informality and uncertainty[19] consequently invaded those institutions that impregnated a wide range of routines, beliefs and experiences in all segments of urban life, including urban activism. They are part of the evolving legacies of (post-) socialism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

The contributions in this volume refer to these specific as well as global features of urban contexts in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and may thus speak to a broad audience.

Against the background of authoritarian neoliberalism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the book's contributions repeatedly highlight the essential power of the everyday and spaces of everydayness for urban activism.[20] It is not only highly symbolic places, but also spaces of everydayness, such as mundane infrastructures and activities, that shape the routines and moods of citizens. These are often 'objects of contestation', 'spaces of mobilisation' and 'scenes of contestation'.[21] In this vein, Carola Neugebauer et al. state: 'urban spaces of the everyday life are central for civic activism in Eastern Europe. These spaces – either in the people's backyards, neighbourhoods or in the city as a whole – are the primary objects of contestation'. Similarly, Christian Fröhlich underlines that citizens in Moscow actively protect their direct living environment from intrusion by the state and businesses. And even for mass protest movements like in Armenia, spaces of everydayness are explicitly chosen as 'scenes of contestation' and 'mobilisation space' instead of only using prominent urban places with high symbolism and tight controls such as central squares and promenades (cf. Nadja Douglas, Levon Abrahamian and Gayane Sagoyan). Physical spaces of everydayness are key to urban activism that plays within the arenas of arts (cf. Joahim Otto Habeck & Jonas Büchel in this volume), urban planning or education in urbanism (cf. Oleg Pachenkov & Lilia Voronkova, interview Nazaket Azimli in this volume).

The book's contributions underline, moreover, the importance of and differences between the local state regimes. Although authoritarian neoliberalism is predominant in post-Soviet Eastern Europe and Eurasia, its local varieties (results of 'domestification') differ importantly and thus the opportunities and constraints for urban activism vary accordingly. This could apply to the extent and manner of how public authorities

19 Ledeneva, Alena *Global Encyclopedia of Informality, Volume 1: Towards Understanding of Social and Cultural Complexity* (London 2018); Polese, Abel et al., '"States" of Informality in Post-socialist Europe (and Beyond)', *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2016), pp. 181–190.

20 Jacobsson, Kerstin (ed.), *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (London 2015); Goldstein, Piotr, 'Post-Yugoslav Everyday Activism(s): a Different Form of Activist Citizenship?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 69, no. 9 (2017), pp. 55–72.

21 Gestring, Norbert, Ruhne, Renate, and Wehrheim, Jan (eds), *Stadt und soziale Bewegungen* (Wiesbaden, 2014).

(political bodies and executive administrations) respond to urban activists. The contributions of Pachenkov et al. and Fröhlich, the analyses of Neugebauer et al. and Formozov highlight effectively the ambivalences and diversity of the local states. On the one hand, they describe more or less supportive local political regimes such as in St. Petersburg and, in particular, the Russian North with its shrinking/depopulating mono-cities, where urban activists repair or build social and cultural infrastructure. On the other hand, the authors report on more negative local government regimes like in Perm or Moscow. So far, we know little what drives these differences: the local history of and experiences with activism, the socioeconomic contexts of the cities or the objects of activism? Nevertheless, we note that the local state in the form of specific power arrangements, formal and informal institutions that structure the interactions between the public (political and administrative) and economic sphere and the urban activists cannot be ignored.

Finally, in line with research on informality in post-socialist economic and political transformations,[22] the book reveals the role of informality anew for urban activism in the different arenas of urban planning, arts and education. The book's contributions accentuate the ambiguous relevance of informality and uncertainty for post-socialist activism. On one hand, uncertainty and informality act as constraints for urban activism. In particular, informal interactions among (local) political and economic elites in urban planning and development constitute a power resource that restricts the opportunities of urban activists to voice and pursue their interests effectively (see Neugebauer et al., Rekhviashvili et al. and Fröhlich in this volume). Activists rarely have access to these circles, since stakeholders in power seem to share common concepts (informal institutions), such as keeping citizens away from co-decision-making power in urban governance (cf. Neugebauer et al. in this volume). The uncertainty of processes and developments increases the 'costs of collective actions' for urban activists (cf. Neugebauer et al. in this volume).

On the other hand and at the same time, uncertainty and informality may create unique opportunities for activism. Manifold constraints force urban activists to seek uncommon opportunities, i.e. to negotiate and create new flexible strategies in struggling for the city and the new sociability of public spaces. To some extent, it is the uncertainty and sense

22 Ledeneva, Alena, *Global Encyclopedia of Informality, Volume 1: Towards Understanding of Social and Cultural Complexity* (London 2018); Abel Polese et al., '"States" of Informality in Post-socialist Europe (and Beyond)', *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2016), pp. 181–190.

of informality – in the form of personal ties and non-institutionalised cooperation–that provide 'freedom' and additional opportunities for new urban activism. Thus, in local contexts of restrictions and uncertainty, many urban initiatives and active individuals refrain from participating in classical NGO models, and instead invest in the growth of professional competences and scale of activities based on informal networks (cf. Pachenkov & Voronkova as well as Semenov in this volume). Several chapters in this volume look at the way informality is exploited in small scale and everyday activism. They highlight the significance of face-to-face initiatives and peer-to-peer strategies for the emancipation of citizens in St. Petersburg (cf. Oleg Pachenkov & Lilia Voronkova), the 'temporal logics' of bottom-up engagement in Kaunas (cf. Otto Habeck & Jonas Büchel), or the 'tea diplomacy' of activists in Baku who encouraged khrushchevka dwellers to fight for changes in their environment.

The Dynamism and Flexibility of Urban Activism

Though in (Western) public debate a simplistic view of weak, passive and scared citizens in Eastern European and Eurasian cities still prevails, scholars researching emerging grassroots activism and urban protests in Eastern Europe underline unanimously the great variety in urban activism. Kerstin Jacobsson,[23] for example, talks of 'the rich variety of forms of urban protest and the heterogeneous collectives presently engaged in urban activism across a number of post-socialist countries. Some citizen mobilisations are spontaneous and short-lived while others are better organised and long lasting. Some are more reactive while others more proactive, some more progressive and others more conservative in their claims, some disruptive in their actions while others – most in fact – are more moderate in their form of protest'. The contributions in this volume also underline the plurality of urban activism. Image 1 summarises as exemplar the seven dimensions along which the book's contributions and previous studies most often attempted to capture the evolving civic urban engagement in Eastern Europe. The descriptive categories refer to the 'activities', 'actors', 'levels of organisation', 'resources', 'places and spaces of interventions', 'durability' and 'claims' of urban activisms.

Apart from this descriptive summary, however, the figure should draw attention to three observations emerging from this volume. First, the

23 Jacobsson, Kerstin 'Introduction: The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe', in Jacobsson, Kerstin (ed.), *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, (London, 2015), p. 3.

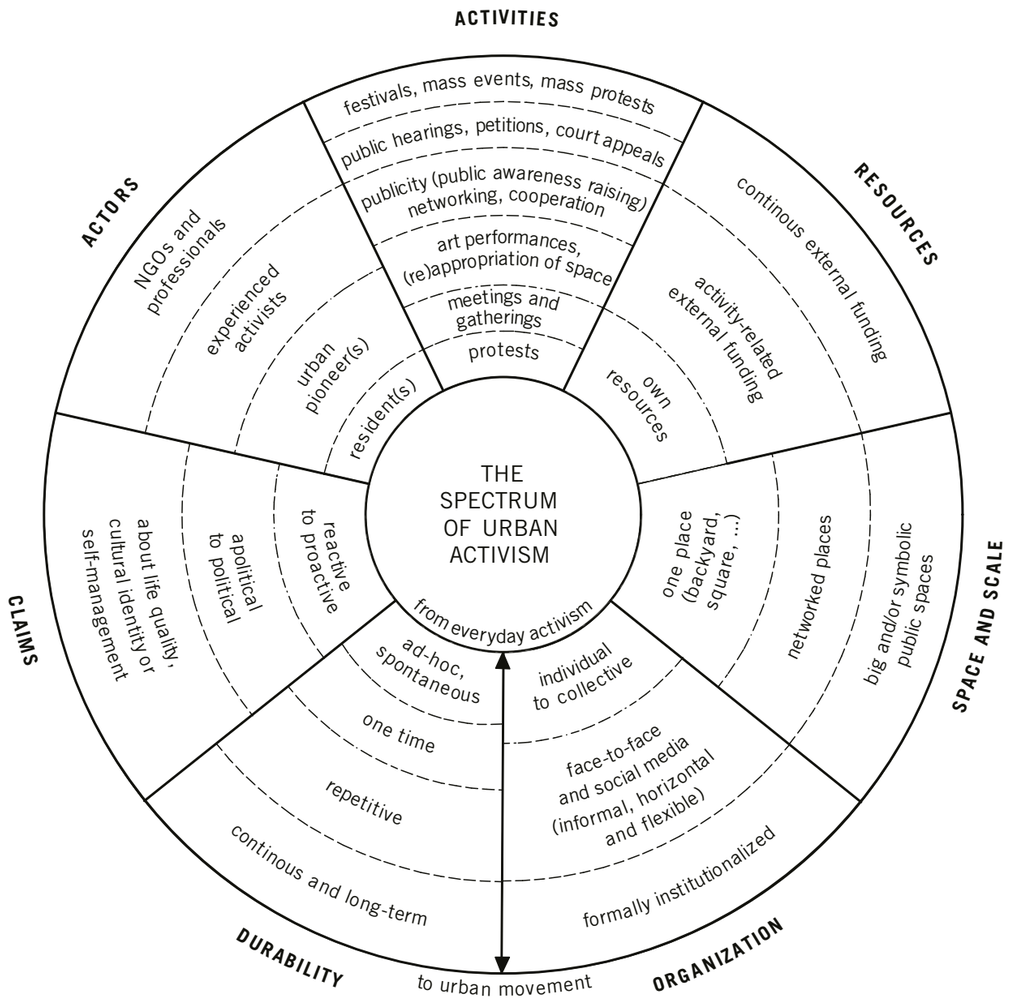

Image 1
Source: C. Neugebauer, T. Darieva, J. Nieper

figure should call to mind the broad understanding of urban activism that underlines this volume and that we defined in the beginning of this chapter. We argue for the value and need to relate the increasingly researched urban movements in Eastern Europe and Eurasia – placed in the outer circle of this figure – to the individual, short-term micro interventions of everyday activism – here in the inner circle of the figure. In particular, the latter creates 'low-budget', 'intimately public' [24] counter-spaces and counter-sociality practices, which differ from the classic NGO format that constitutes only one organisational form for urban movements. Locally driven everyday activism on a micro level as well as the individual acts in larger-scale domains without specific institutionalisations are important: Though they may remain politically unnoticed, they can sensitise and mobilise others.[25]
The second argument we use is that, instead of distinctive types of urban activism, we witness blurred and overlapping boundaries and multiple combinations between the different organisational forms, activities, resources, claims and places of urban activisms. Urban activism in post-Soviets cities cannot be captured as a perfect circle, i.e. as a consistent and smooth sequence of different types of activism, but so far only as a kind of broken spectrum, which calls for further research and conceptualisation. Thirdly, the volume's contributions highlight the high dynamism and flexibility of post-Soviet urban activism. This regards the observable potential of politicisation in everyday urban activism, for example. The mere distinction between political and apolitical activism is further challenged by the question of how processes of (de-) politicisation operate (cf. Abrahamian and Shagoyan). Similarly, there is the evolutionary nexus between claims of 'pro-active' versus 'reactive activism' and the flexible and fluid negotiations within groups of urban activists about the different forms of self-organisation (cf. Pachenkov et al.). We see flexible and changing patterns of networked civic actors, practices (tactics and strategies) and claims, constantly 'learning', adapting and contesting the actual urban regimes. Various contributions and interviews in this volume report of the multiple forms of exchange and (mutual) learning, e.g. with international, national and local peers via face-to-face or social media gatherings.

24 Schröder, Philipp, *Urban Spaces and Lifestyles in Central Asia and Beyond*, (New York, 2017).

25 The everyday activism's power in local urban environments in Eurasia (e.g. the Guerilla Gardening in Tbilisi) can be brought in line with the term 'infrapolitics' that has been launched by James Scott to differentiate small acts of subaltern and invisible interventions in public spheres. Scott, James, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven 1992). It is similar to what Sarah Pink has identified as 'local socialities'. Pink, Sarah, 'Re-Thinking Contemporary Activism: From Community to Emplaced Sociality', *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 73, no. 2 (2008), pp. 163–188, or Piotr Goldstein's observations of 'discreet activism' in Eastern Europe (2018).

Urban Pioneers and Urban Pioneering

It would appear that, in addition to authoritarian structures with new elites and power aesthetics, we can observe a rise in urban actors who create their own perspectives and critical positions for the use and design of urban places. They are 'ordinary residents', non-elite urban dwellers who engage in multiple ways of claiming and co-producing place. Some of the book's authors explore the distinctive experiences of urban pioneers in post-Soviet big and smaller post-industrial cities as 'informal' agents of social and/or political change 'from below' (e.g. Formosov, Habeck & Büchel, Pachenkov & Voronkova).
In her contribution and in her interview, Nazaket Azimli illustrates, for example, small-scale successes in a khrushchevka project whereby she and her peers turned an old Soviet-style courtyard sociability into a self-organised powerful instrument in mobilizing disempowered citizens in Baku, at least temporarily. They offered new forms of individual appropriation, identity options and networking, shaping the local histories and cultures of city districts. 'Urban pioneers' also engage in defending, revitalizing and creating new publicly accessible spaces through small-scale direct actions and urban festivals. They are not necessarily part of classical social urban movements or members of NGOs and trade unions, and they may not cooperate with urban planners on a systematic level, but rather they attempt to act by contributing their own time and money on both on a micro-level and/or on larger scale projects.
The strategies and tactics may differ importantly, as the contributions of Habeck & Büchel as well as Pachenkov & Voronkova illustrate: On one hand, there is a significant number of invisible and hidden tactics and engagements of 'ordinary citizens' that develop and create a counterpoint to centralised and neoliberal systems in Kaunas. On the other hand, urban pioneers develop participatory and strategic ways of claiming urban spaces in which 'urban good' is negotiated with urban planners, administrations and investors, as for instance in St. Petersburg and Irkutsk. Urban pioneers do not change the surrounding world by means of destruction and open large scale protests; they claim to add new meanings to spaces, playing with what is taken for granted, compromising common sense, by forming attractive images of new values (see interview with Lev Vladov from Chelyabinsk). Consequently, the role of

urban pioneering in the post-Soviet societies is not only taking over 'vacant areas' in the city and disused places, typical for instance for Berlin's urban pioneers,[26] but also mobilising individuals to resist and change the existing order and physical environment where they live or work.
The material gathered in this volume suggests that a specific set of urban pioneer claims and motivations exists in each context, though they may differ importantly in detail. Placing the common good above their own profit, urban pioneers' major aim is to make the city not only 'comfortable', but also lively, attractive and allowing for self-realisation and self-development of its residents. The book's interviews and the different contributions reveal a series of motivations. A sufficient reason is the unsatisfactory living environment; activists often referred to not being involved in city development processes and the need to claim the city as theirs. Moreover, Lela Rekviashvili et al. adumbrate the diversity of motivations of urban activists: in some cases, they are also driven by a professional interest in urban development issues. Often, personal motives and friend-networks provide an additional explanation for why people became socially active. Thus, personal involvement of citizens plays a crucial role in the process of urban mobilisation in Eastern Europe.
The socio-demographic profile of urban pioneers is heterogeneous. For instance, whereas the age of activists groups in Tbilisi participating in urban protests varies from 20 up to 60 years, it is the local youth and young entrepreneurs who engage in creating new public places in the polar town of Kovdor. At the same time, we should not overlook a relatively high level of education and 'social skills'. Urban pioneers are often university graduates, engaged in intellectual and creative work associated with cultural heritage, architecture, geography and sociology.
In conclusion, we do not see 'urban pioneers' as a static and clearly definable group of people. Rather, they are inseparable from everyday activism among 'ordinary people'. Yet, they do 'pioneering work' in their respective urban contexts: They contest existent patterns and develop different innovative ideas, practices, claims, strategies and modes of self-organisation, and in doing so, urban pioneers mobilise others to perceive existent patterns differently and/or to become active as well.
So far, the actual impact of urban pioneering is unclear. From Western experiences and research, we learn about potential 'threats to' and 'pitfalls' of evolving urban activism, and even though this is not explored

26 Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, *Urban Pioneers. Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin* (Berlin, 2011).

in this volume at length, the book's contributions also offer hints in this vein. They may provoke critical questions, such as:

- How do we – how do urban pioneers and activists – delineate the threshold between cooperation and co-optation? The book's contributions highlight several times the (close) links between activists and public authorities, in particular Pachenkov & Voronkova, Formozov and Neugebauer et al.
- Is the emergence of 'new activists' an enriching moment or the start of new frontiers due to pluralisation and dispersion within the active civil society as described by Margit Mayer[27] for West Germany?
- What are the impacts of urban activism that steps in because the local state and big business have failed, like in Kovdor (Murmansk area) where activists become the 'social urban infrastructure' (cf. Formozov in this volume)?
- Can urban activism deploy the 'capacity of structural change'? The limits to urban activism is discussed in the volume by Neugebauer et al., Rekhviashvili et al. or Fröhlich.

Conclusion

Drawing on fascinating documents, which show individual and multi-disciplinary perspectives on the issue, this volume contributes to the overcoming of distances and, in this way, triggers dialogues in several discourses and realms: among the interested public, activists, 'urban decision makers' and scholars in East and West, North and South alike. We argue against a simplistic view of citizens in post-Soviet Eastern Europe and Eurasian cities. Rather we underline recent scholarly arguments for the rich emerging landscape of urban activism there. Moreover, we show the distinct dynamism and flexibility in Eastern European urban activism. Urban pioneers and pioneering work are therefore essential, although the impacts of urban activism, in terms of its capacity to trigger good or bad structural changes to the prevailing patterns and process of urban life and city production, are still debatable. In any case, an emerging, new type of pioneering in urban activism is observable in Eastern Europe and Eurasia and it calls for closer attention. This holds true in particular in view of the differentiated local urban regimes that

27 Mayer, Margit, 'Social movements in European cities: transitions from the 1970s to the 1990s', in Arnaldo Bagnasco and Patrick Le Galés (eds) *Cities in Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 131–152.

shape urban activism and are contested by it at the same time. The urban regimes in the post-Soviet realm are distinct given the authoritarian tendencies and post-socialist legacies, e.g. in form of informality and uncertainty (as chance and challenge for activism). At the same time, neoliberalism brings urban regimes and activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia close to its global peers in the West, North and South.

Apart from dynamism and flexibility, this volume highlights the essential power of everyday activism and spaces of everydayness for urban activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (cf. Scott 1999, also Jacobsson 2015). Though urban spaces play out in activism in the three well-known respects, namely as 'objects of contestation', 'mobilisation spaces' and 'scenes of contestation', the specificity of urban activism in Eastern Europe is that it very often refers to spaces of everydayness. Finally, we argue that a broad understanding of urban activism– at least at this early stage of research and interdisciplinary reflection–is the most appropriate way to capture the dynamic creativity and pioneering novelties of urban civic engagement in post-Soviet Eurasia.

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01

Grassroots Urban Mobilisation in Russia[1]

Andrei Semenov

1 The research is supported by the Russian Science Foundation grant (RSF №18-78-10054) 'Mechanisms of Interests Coordination in the Urban Development Processes'

How widespread is grassroots urban mobilisation in contemporary Russia? What are the basic patterns of such a mobilisation? Based on the event analysis of the incidences of mobilisation across Russian cities from 2012 to 2014, this chapter presents a new look into the field of grassroots activism. I argue that transformations of urban environments in post-Soviet Russia brought multiple actors to the public fora that aim at challenging the incursions of powerful players like public authorities or businesses into their habitat. Using cluster analysis as a tool, I unravel multiple strands of urban contention, distinct because of their magnitude, repertoire, targets and location. I show that the bulk of mobilisation targets the projects that infringe on the rights of the citizens (infill construction, demolition of green and recreational areas, evictions etc.). However, despite the ubiquitous character of state and business incursions, the demands of the public remain particular: in rare instances the locals are able to build coalitions with other groups in order to defend their rights.

Urban landscapes in Russia changed substantially in 2000s. Oil and gas windfalls triggered a rapid development in urban areas: growing demand for commercial and residential real estate and increasing shortage of the land coupled with loose regulations and powerful alliances between businesses and public bureaucracies dramatically transformed the material environment of the post-Soviet cities. Alongside this transformation, historical buildings were demolished, green zones eliminated and playgrounds were replaced with high-rise buildings and shopping malls. These developments reintroduced contention as a powerful factor in a seemingly quiescent Russia under Vladimir Putin's presidency. Scholars recognised these shifts and tried to document and explain the scope and the underlying mechanisms of urban mobilisation in Russia. Carine Kleman and her colleagues (2010, 2013) meticulously described the emerging housing and urban movements within the framework of activist sociology.[2] Green (2014) argued that sustained collective actions occurred when there was a cohesive and consistent state intrusion into the lives of urban dwellers.[3] Others resorted to the concept of 'growth machines' to explain the tensions between the urbanites and authorities/business.[4] Urban mobilisation itself took different forms, sometimes surpassing local boundaries like in a conflict around construction in the Patriarch Pond district in Moscow that involved national celebrities and

2 Kleman, Carine, Miryasova, Olga and Demidov, Andrei, *Ot obyvatelei k aktivistam: zarozdayussiesya socialnye dvizheniya v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Tri Kvadrata, 2010).

Kleman, Carine, *Urban Movements of Russia in 2009-2012: On the Way to Political* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2013).

3 Green, S., *Moscow in Movement. Power and Oppositions in Putin´s Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

4 Tykanova, Elena and Khokhlova, Anisia, 'The Urban Political Regime in St. Petersburg: the Role of Real and Imagined "Growth Machines", the Struggle for Urban Space', *The Journal of Social Policy Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2015), pp. 241–256.

members of the State Duma[5], sometimes being confined to a particular location.[6] What are the patterns of urban grassroots mobilisation and its features like repertoire, target and magnitude? Are there distinct clusters in urban collective actions? I explore these questions with the data on over 500 incidences of grassroots protests that took place between 2012 and 2014.

Grassroots urban mobilsation is defined here as collective public claim-making made by the citizens without prior organisational support, tackling the issues related to the transformation of urban environment. The 'grassroots' part indicates that the initial stage of mobilisation was driven by citizens alone rather than professional activists or established organisations. The urban nature of the collective action is harder to grasp: some protests clearly germinate from direct intrusion of powerful actors into the urban fabric, e.g. collective actions against infill construction or for the preservation of green zones and recreational areas. Other instances sit on the border between neighboring domains of political life. Here, 'urban' refers to the transformation and governance of physical and immaterial environment of the cities. Hence, this study encompasses a wide range of protests – from hoodwinked house investors to aggrieved garage cooperative members whose boxes were slated for demolition.

The data come from media reports deposited in the Integrum media database with over 40,000 newspapers and more than one billion articles stored. With a team of research assistants, we screened the database for the instances of grassroots urban mobilisation as defined above in the timespan of 2012–2014. The process of collecting the data consisted of a search query in the database, screening and downloading the primary sources, coding and checking the data for consistency. Out of 6,000 protest events in three years, 543 were qualified to match our definition, an additional 450 were related to urban politics but lacked the 'grassroots' feature. Table 1 shows the comparison of the overall number of protest events per year with respective categories of 'Urban' and 'Grassroots Urban' protests.

Year	All	Urban	%	GR-Urban	%
2012	2399	381	0.16	219	0.09
2013	2075	400	0.19	217	0.11
2014	1315	212	0.16	107	0.08
Total	**5789**	**993**	**0.17**	**543**	**0.09**

Table 1
Grassroots urban protest events per year
Source: CPR data.

Overall, 543 events out of 5,789 (9%) between 2012–2014 can be counted as grassroots urban mobilisation events. The pattern is surprisingly stable over time: about 17% on average of the total protest events per year are related to urban issues and about half of them do not have organisational sponsorship. The spatial distribution of the protest events is very uneven: in Saint-Petersburg, 60 incidences of mobilisation occurred during the three years under study, with Moscow (37) and Novosibirsk (33) following. The largest cities are indeed the most contentious: 182 out of 543 incidences (35%) took place in the capitals and millionniki (cities with over one million inhabitants). Large (500-1,000 thousands of people) and medium-sized (100-500 thousands of people) cities each account for 18% (99 and 96 incidences respectively). Contention in small cities exists but it is sporadic and not very visible. Overall, the relation between the size of the urban population and intensity of grassroots mobilisation appears to be exponential (Figure 1.): the number of protest events is flat for almost the entire sample, but starts to grow rapidly once the population size approaches one million.

Another feature worth investigating is the targets of mobilisation, defined as addressees, that are explicitly mentioned during protest events: actors or institutions whose attention the protesters are struggling to have. Authorities of different levels are the most frequent subjects of claims (Figure 2.) with municipal (local) authorities as the largest target subcategory (48%). Regional authorities come second (21%), and – consistent with literature on neoliberal transformations and growth machines – private companies constitute the third largest category for targets (14%). For mobilised citizens the local authorities are either the source of the problem (when the plans for infrastructural projects are announced or decisions on land allocation/construction permits are made) or the solution. However, in the great share of protest events activists explicitly appeal to the targets outside specific domain/arena of interactions. Thus, hoodwinked investors and evicted householders appeal to president Putin as a guarantor of their rights, or activists may target regional authorities on the issues of local development.

5 Argenbright, Robert, *Moscow Under Construction: City Building, Place-Based Protest and Civil Society* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2016).

6 Jacobsson, Kerstin (ed.), *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

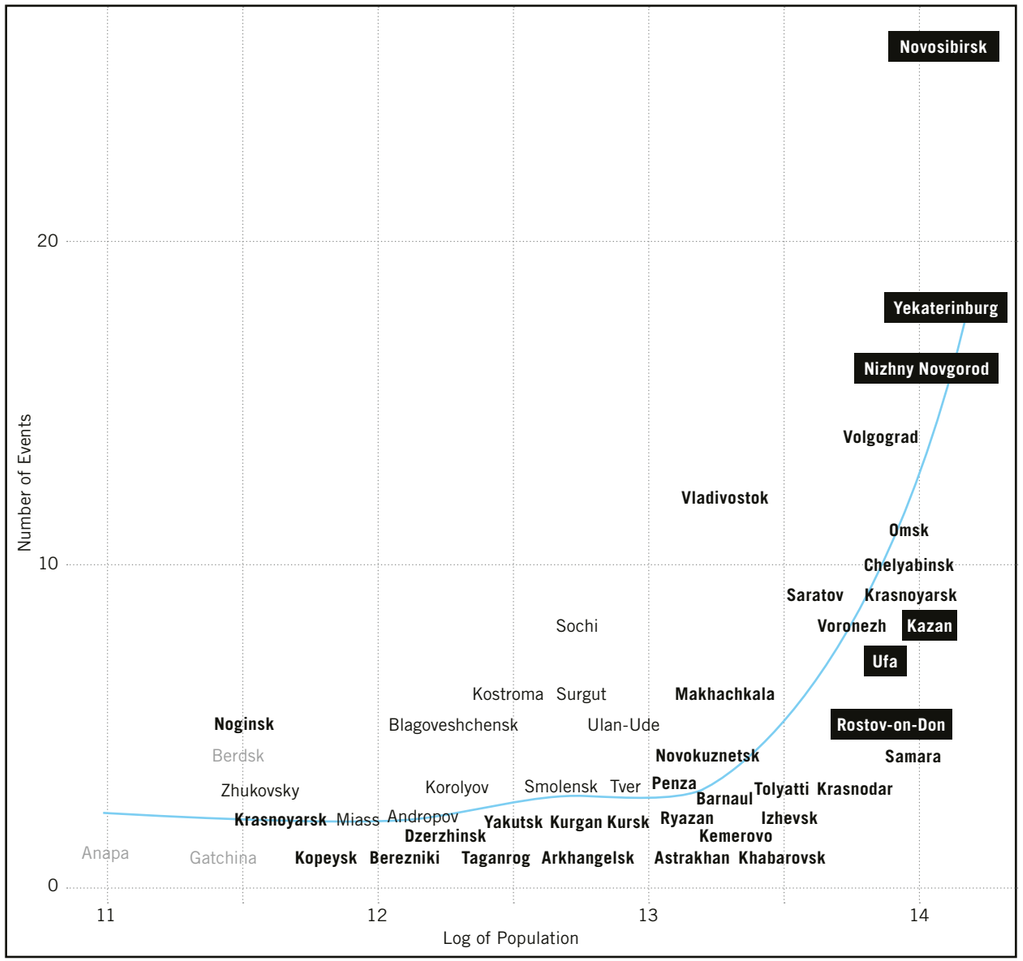


Figure 1
Scatterplot of the natural log of city population vs. aggregated number of urban grassroots events (2012–2014). Moscow and Saint Petersburg are excluded.
Source: CPR data.

Figure 2
Targets of the grassroots protest events (2012–2014)
Source: CPR data.

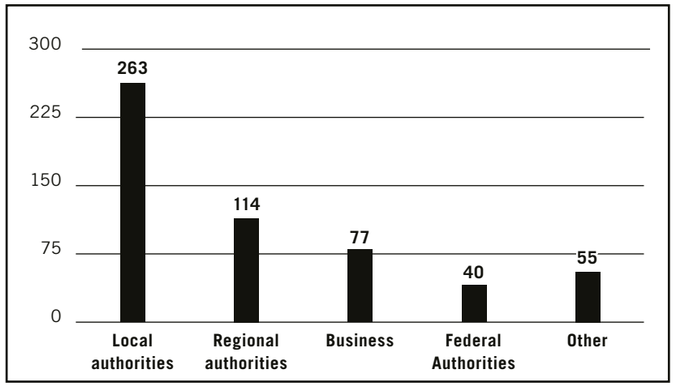
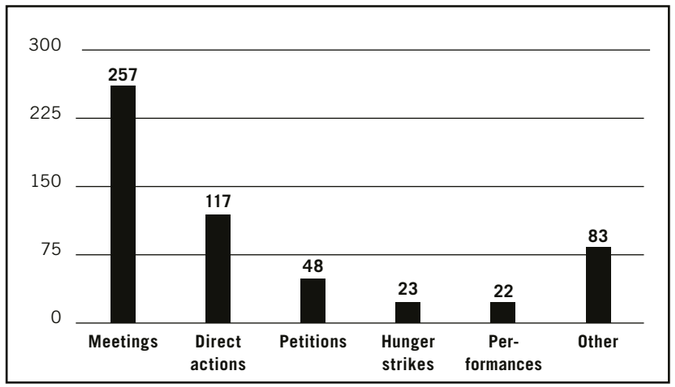


Figure 3
Repertoire of grassroots protest (2012–2014)
Source: CPR data.



The repertoire of grassroots mobilisation is highly symbolical with meetings, pickets, petitions and public performances, combined accounting for 60% of the events (Figure 3.). However, the numerous direct actions and wildcat protests (road blockades, seizure of construction sites and spontaneous gatherings) are also widespread (117 events in three years or 21% of the total number). Although a minor share, hunger strikes remain a visible tactical choice.

Issue	Frequency	Share
Construction	166	0.30
Transportation	63	0.12
Evictions	62	0.11
Municipal services	55	0.10
House investors	53	0.10
Recreational areas	41	0.09
Other	35	0.07
Industrial development	22	0.04
Heritage protection	16	0.03
Infrastructural projects	9	0.02
Waste management	9	0.02
Land issues	7	0.01
Animal rights	5	0.01
Total	**543**	

Table 2
Urban grassroots mobilisation by issue (aggregated numbers for 2012–2014)

In terms of issues, the Russians express their grievances across a wide range of questions related to the urban environment. Mobilisation against construction projects is by far the most visible part of urban grassroots activism. Combined with protests against the encroachments on the recreational areas and greenery, this issue constitutes 39% of the total. Collective actions that tackle transportation (road maintenance, public transport routs and tariffs) account for 12% of the events; every tenth incident revolves around the municipal service quality issues and evictions.

In short, urban grassroots mobilisation constitutes an evergreen background for urban life in Russia. Of course, it is not confined to public protests and encompasses a variety of other instruments inducing lawsuits, contacting officials, roundtables and community gatherings among others. However, the analysis of collective actions allows us to track the dynamics and assess the patterns of mobilisation. For one thing, it shows that grassroots collective actions follow national trends: they rise and fall with the ebbs and flows of contention. Likewise, the bulk of urban grassroots organising is concentrated in big metropolitan areas, where the effects of restructuring of the urban environment are more pronounced.

Symbolic actions (meetings, pickets, performances, flash-mobs) targeting local authorities are typical forms of contentious claim-making. However, there is s considerable variation across these dimensions in time and space that requires further investigation.

How do these findings speak to existing scholarship on the urban development of post-communist countries? First, it calls for a clarification of concepts like 'mobilisation', 'activism' and 'movements' in the context of urban studies. Not every collective effort to resist the assault of powerful actors on urban life leads to sustained interactions between the citizens and the state or businesses, the latter being a defining characteristic of urban movements. Likewise, professionalisation of urban grassroots mobilisation is a rare occurrence, with a majority of incidences dissolving after the case is closed. In this regards, 'urban activism' and 'urban movements' are subsets of a larger phenomenon of urban grassroots mobilisation. On the other hand, seemingly one-shot protest events are in fact a part of a larger process of information gathering, communication and coordination between the aggrieved citizens.

Second, the vast majority of grassroots collective actions revolves around particular demands; they fall short of the Manuel Castells' definition of urban social movements as collective actions oriented towards transforming social structures and urban meanings.[7] Rather than being representations of the 'right to the city' numerous protests against infill construction, demolition of green zones or garage sites manifest the desire of locals to defend particular places in a 'not in my backyard' fashion. At times, grassroots actions from different parts of the city coalesce into broad coalitions, but their existence is contingent upon numerous factors.

Nevertheless, this study indicates the ubiquitous character of urban grassroots activism in Russia. Across the country, citizens struggle for their entitlements, thus making the powerholders accountable for their actions whether it is infill construction, failure to provide public services or poor regulation and oversight of construction business. The responsiveness of authorities differs from one city to another, and varies in time; exploring the determinants of such variation goes beyond the scope of this chapter, nevertheless it constitutes a promising avenue for further work. For now, it is important to note that the restructuring of the post-socialist cities does not go unnoticed: citizens can get organised and defend their communities despite numerous obstacles and the perceived uselessness of action.

7 Castells, Manuel, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

02

From Static to Mobile:
Protest Movements in the Urban Structure, the Case in Yerevan

Levon Abrahamian, Gayane Shogoyan

Presently big cities, with their often tangled infrastructure and inhabitants who scarcely know or never met each other, have become the arena of protest actions. And since the most well-known centre of a town is the main square, such actions usually take place just there.

This was the case with Yerevan in February 1988, when people gathered in the Theatre Square at the Opera house in the centre of the city (Image 1) to support Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabagh enclave in the Azerbaijanian SSR in their decision to join the Armenian SSR. This marked the beginning of the Karabagh Movement[1] which played for Armenia the same role as the series of revolutions in 1989 in Eastern Europe. The Theatre Square was later renamed into Freedom Square, which became the most popular place for protest gatherings for the next 30 years. Although Yerevan experienced an earlier mass protest action or rather an unauthorised commemoration action in April 1965 (the 50th anniversary of the Armenian genocide in Ottoman Turkey), the mass demonstrations rather followed the topographical model of the Soviet parades. The main procession used the same parade route but in the inversed direction – from the Lenin Square (the present Republic Square) through the main 'parade' streets. Later in the evening people gathered also in Theatre Square, because the official commemoration ceremony was taking place in the Opera building where participants of the action, the ordinary commemorators, were not invited.

During the Karabagh related rallies (1988–1990), the topographic aspect of protest actions became more visible in the structure of the city. The centre of the city planned by the architect Alexander Tamanyan has two squares, Lenin Square and Theatre Square. The first was surrounded by government buildings, had a Lenin's monument as a landmark and a tribune from where the Communist authorities greeted parades during official Soviet festivals. The Theatre Square was used for cultural events; mass demonstrations and parades had to take place just here, with the original name, People's House of the Opera, reflecting this original idea.[2] However, it remained just a space without any special social function. In 1988 it actually embodied the architect's dream, becoming the place of non-stop rallies, which could be compared with a political festival (Image 2).[3] Lenin Square was rejected by the protesters, thus dividing topographically people's space and authority's space in the structure of the city. Sometimes a picturesque action of protest was organised also in the Lenin Square, but only to demonstrate to the high-ranking authorities the will and power

1 See, e.g. Ashot Sargsyan, Gharabaghyan sharzhman patmut'yun, 1988–1989 [The History of the Karabagh Movement, 1988–1989] (Yerevan: Antares, 2018); Malkasian, Mark, *'Gha-ra-bagh!' The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996); Abrahamian, Levon, 'Civil Society Born in the Square: The Karabagh Movement in Perspective', in Chorbajian, Levon (ed.), *The Making of Nagorno-Karabagh: From Secession to Republic*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 116–134.

2 Abrahamian, Levon, 'Tamanyan's Yerevan Between Constructivism and Stalin Era Architecture', ISPS Convention 2017: Modernization and Multiple Modernities, Dubai: KnE Social Sciences, 2018, pp. 231–241.

3 Abrahamian, Levon, 'Chaos and Cosmos in the Structure of Mass Popular Demonstrations. (The Karabakh Movement in the Eyes of an Ethnographer)', *Soviet Anthropology & Archeology*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1990), pp. 70–86.

Image 1
Theatre Square, February 1988
Photo: Gagik Harutyunyan.

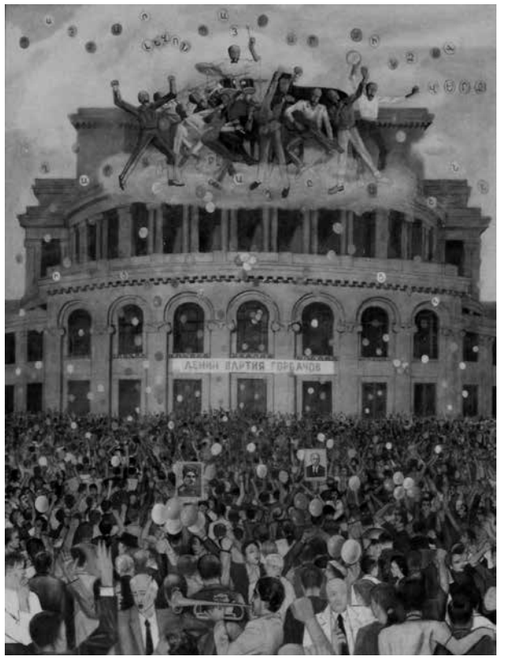


Image 2
Theatre Square in 1988
Painting by Hakob Hakobian, 2000.

Image 3
Lenin Square, the last Soviet parade, 7 November 1988
Photo: Hautyun Marutyan.

of the 'people's' square. The two squares were actually competing with each other.[4] The number of participants in the rallies was also an important point in such 'square competition', the opposition usually overstated the number of its participants, while authorities tended to understate it. Rejection of the authority's square for the people's square first happened during the last Soviet parade on 7 November 1988 (Image 3). Hearing the protesters' call melody of the trumpet, the Soviet parade participants left the Lenin Square, the parade's final destination, and moved towards the Theatre Square, leaving the Communist authorities alone on the tribune. Even when marches following different routes were regularly organised, they were just temporary demonstrations of the protest power which folded back into the static standing or sitting protests in the square. The Karabagh Movement was an outcome of Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, this term corresponding to the Armenian *hraparakaynutyun* with the root *hraparak* meaning 'town square'. That is, people expressed glasnost-openness ('squareness') literally in the square. This connection between glasnost and square is so deep that it was 'possible to make a conclusion about the one from examining the other. For example, from the condition of Theatre Square alone it was possible to judge accurately the state of glasnost in the country'.[5] Since the Theatre Square became a kind

4 Levon Abrahamian, 'Yerevan: Memory and Forgetting in the Organisation of Post-Soviet Urban Space', in Baiburin A., Kelly C., Vakhtin N. (eds), *Russian Cultural Anthropology after the Collapse of Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 254–275, here pp. 264–265.

5 Levon Abrahamian, 'Chaos and Cosmos' pp. 74, 75.

Image 4
Mass meeting at Matenadaran, February 2003
Photo: Zaven Sargsyan.

of a symbol of the Karabagh Movement, authorities tended to fight against it, as the fight against foreign religions and ideologies turns into a fight against the place associated with them. In this context the regular prohibitions regarding Theatre Square and attempts to destroy this symbol were discussed, for example, organizing for not entirely comprehensible reasons some construction works in the square in the summer of 1989[6] or beginning the long-term construction of parking lot under the square in 2008. This fight against the main ideological symbol under the pretext of city improvement was even mocked during one of the meetings organised outside the Theatre Square after such improvement works: a letter allegedly written by residents of a periphery city quarter asked protesters to organise rallies also in their quarter in order to have some long expected improvements there too.

As for the opposition of centre–periphery in the urban structure, authorities several times asked protesters to move their mass meetings to some peripheral spaces, but the leaders of the opposition always rejected such proposals, we think not only because of risks of further repressive actions of authorities far off the peoples' eyes, but also because of the centripetal trend of the mass protest actions. The only alternative place of the mass meetings (counting out a number of one- or two-time testing cases) was

6 Abrahamian, Levon, 'Archaic Ritual and Theatre: From the Ceremonial Glade to Theatre Square', *Soviet Anthropology & Archeology*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1990), pp. 45–69, here p. 47.

Image 5
Protests at the Mashtots park, 13 March 2012
Photo: Hamlet Melkumyan.

the space before the Matenadaran (repository of manuscripts) (Image 4). It could be said that the people's (popular) centre was displaced by a spiritual centre.[7]

There were also some other static protests, which took place not in a square. Such a static protest action was the Mashtots public park protests in winter 2012 aimed at preserving the small park from turning into a marketplace (Image 5). And one more static protest type was blocking a main street and staying there until police would disperse the protesters, sometimes using quite aggressive methods like water cannons (fire pumps) in 2004 (protests requiring the vote of no confidence for the second president Robert Kocharyan) and 2015 (Electric Yerevan protests against the rise of electricity tariff (Image 6, 7, 8)) and even firing for effect on 1 March 2008 resulting in ten people killed (post-electoral rallies rejecting the election of the third president Serzh Sargsyan). As we noted, all these protest actions were static and could last for quite a long time depending, first of all, on the place of gathering. Thus Karabagh rallies (its first stage) lasted, with periods of breaks, some nine months, and the Mashtots park stand lasted for some 80 days. They could last for a long period of time, since they occupied not very functional places in the urban structure, while Electric Yerevan which had blocked a very involved street in the urban

7 Abrahamian, Levon. *Armenian Identity in a Changing World* (California: Mazda Publishers, 2006), pp. 237–238.

Image 6
One of the authors (Levon Abrahamian) meeting a veteran of the Karabagh Movement at the Electric Yerevan protests, 11 July 2015
Photo: Gayane Shagoyan.

Image 7
Electric Yerevan protesters preparing for possible tear gas attack, 24 June 2015
Photo: Gayane Shagoyan.

Image 8
Anna Hakobyan, the wife of the initiator of the 'Velvet Revolution' of 2018, the future prime-minister Nikol Pashinyan, standing in front of the police shields during the Electric Yerevan protests. The humorous inscription 'I am coming' on her T-shirt for pregnant women tunes with the future popular hashtack '#we are coming' and as if foretells the forthcoming revolution, 24 June 2015
Photo: Gayane Shagoyan.

Image 9
Political promenades along the Northern Avenue. Protesters supporting political prisoners stopped their walking for a snapshot, 27 August 2008
Photo: Gayane Shagoyan.

Image 10
'We pay 100 drams' protests against the transportation fare raising, 25 July 2012
Photo: Aghasi Tadevosyan.

communication structure, lasted for some 20 days, already a period too long for such a strategic street.

In contrast to the listed protest actions which mainly focus on the static aspect of the actions, other protest activities used mobile, dynamic aspects. As we have noted, the mobile aspect was present also in statically focused actions – marches accompanying gatherings in one spot, but they were not the driving force of the protests or were of equal value, as in the spontaneous actions of 1965. The 'pure' mobile actions were of different origins and pursued different aims. The first 'pure' mobile action could be considered the so-called 'political promenades' along the Northern Avenue, when protesters were not allowed to gather for static rallies after the dramatic events of 1 March 2008.[8] These protest promenades were taking place just opposite the Freedom Square which was banned for rallies (Image 9). Political promenades here just substituted the usual static rallies and didn't play some special dynamic role; instead of non-stop standing we had non-stop walking. It is symptomatic that the urban structure dictated corresponding protest action – standing/sitting in the square and walking along the avenue.

Other 'pure' mobile protests were the 'We pay 100 drams' [9] actions in 2013. These actions were directed against the *marshrutka* ('van taxi') fare raise and involved practically all the parts of the city, protesters (mainly young people) dispersing along the marshrutkas' routes and encouraging passengers to pay the old fare (Image 10). However, these actions could be called dispersed and decentralised rather than just mobile: routes were already known and predictable, but nevertheless it was the first time the urban structure was involved in protest actions dispersed through the web-structure. Decentralised and 'pure' mobile protest actions took place during the 'Velvet Revolution' of April – May 2018. It had already begun with the moving protest action of Nikol Pashinyan (the future prime-minister) and his confederates – their march from Gyumri to Yerevan. Its slogan, 'Take a step', was actually materialised in real stepping. Here we focus only on the mobile aspect of these recent protest actions, which resulted in non-violent transfer of political power to the protesters.[10] Although the protests began as a moving action, it passed the already experienced static stages of former protest actions – gatherings in the Freedom Square and a lasting block of Baghramyan Avenue. The principally new protest practice was rejecting the static nature of former actions and used more

8 Abrahamian, Levon, 'Yerevan: Memory and Forgetting…', p. 264.

9 Dram (AMD) is the Armenian currency, one euro equals to less than 550 drams.

10 On 'Velvet Revolution' in more detail see Grigoryan, Stepan, *Armianskaia barkhatnaia revoliutsiia* [*Armenian Velvet Revolution*] (Yerevan: Edit Print 2018); and the special issue of Demokratizatsiya: *The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratisation*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2018), dedicated to this event.

Image 11
Demonstration of solidarity and power close to the end of the 'Velvet Revolution', 2 May 2018
Photo: Eviya Hovhannisyan.

Image 12
Celebrating the victory of the 'Velvet Revolution', 8 May 2018
Photo: Lilit Martirosyan.

Image 13
Clergymen standing between police troops and protesters in order to prevent violence during 'Velvet Revolution', 22 April 2018
Photo: Lilit Martirosyan.

Image 14
A participant of the 'Velvet Revolution' is posing for a snapshot at an already successfully blocked street. She is pointing to the main slogan of the protests which reads 'Reject Serzh' (Sargsyan, the third president of Armenia). To her left, a stove is seen, which was used by the protesters during the night vigils. 16 April 2018.
Photo: Levon Abrahamian.

dynamic, mobile tactics. These mobile tactics consisted of the following principles, which interlink the topographic and temporal aspects of the protests. In contrast to long duration of the square-located rallies the new protest practices were characterised by high speed,[11] they were decentralised, involving equally the centre of the city and its periphery, and, as their initiator Nikol Pashinyan accentuated, were 'network' protests. The elementary constituent of the protests was street-blocking, but in a specific mobile way: protesters would block a street and allow the police to unblock it, but some other protesters would block another street, so police had to move there, while this first group would block the street again or move to some other street and so on. While the marshrutka routes were fixed in the urban structure, the blocking activity was unpredictable for the police – Pashinyan was changing the focuses of protest actions randomly, informing followers about them through his Facebook page.[12] More than that, local initiatives were encouraged and residents of different quarters even competed in organizing the blockings, which ranged from blocking the streets with cars, garbage cans and benches to people dancing national dances, playing volleyball or even roasting barbeques (Image 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Having no centre at all, the 'network' protest actions were loosely interconnected and thus more flexible. Now the marches became the moving power and main instrument of the protests, while 'the everyday evening meetings had, among other aims, the goal of demonstrating the power of the protests through their populousness, which was effectively presented by drone photographs (Image 16). In sum, it could be said that while the former rallies were accentuating the place, the Velvet Revolution emphasised the *way*'.[13] As we have already noted, the Republic Square lost the competition with the Freedom Square. Now it was the Republic Square where people gathered in the evenings after the day of network blocking. It was chosen not only because of its larger size but, perhaps unconsciously, because it is open to six streets, which were in fact blocked during the evening mass meetings. While the Freedom Square, being located in the centre of the city, is quite isolated, so that the protests organised there never hindered the transport moving. So we may conclude that getting out of the Freedom Square, the symbol

11 Shagoyan, Gayane, 'Skorost' dvizheniia' ['The speed of moving'], Hamatext, 5 May 2018, <http://hamatext.com/interviews/item/203-skorost-dvizheniya> acc. 1 August 2018.

12 For more on the direct and indirect role of the Fb-communication in the 'Velvet Revolution' see Gayane Shagoyan, Skorost' dvizheniia and Levon Abrahamian, Gayane Shagoyan , 'Velvet Revolution, Armenian Style', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratisation*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2018), pp. 509–530, here pp. 524–529.

13 Abrahamian, Levon, Shagoyan, Gayane, Velvet Revolution, p. 523.

Image 15
Street blocking during 'Velvet Revolution', 25 April 2018
Photo: Milena Khachikyan.

Image 16
A late-afternoon mass meeting in the Republic Square, 2 May 2018
Photo: Garik Ghazaryan.

of the protesting culture of Yerevan, was a significant step, without which the 'Velvet Revolution' would hardly have been realised.[14]

We tried to show how urban spaces were involved in protest movements and were even 'competing' with each other. In this last paragraph we will briefly outline who the actors were who made these temporary virtual changes in the map of the city. During the Karabagh rallies, which were emulated for a long time, the initial actors were students and nationalist intellectuals, while in a couple of days and afterwards the mass body of protesters was comprised of all ages of both sexes and practically of all strata of society.[15] The leaders of the movement, members of the 'Karabagh Committee', were young male intellectuals in their 30s and 40s, and only one member, an academician, was in his 60s. The head of the Committee, the future first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrossian, was 43 in 1988.[16] Twenty years later, he initiated smaller-scale protest actions after

14 Ibid., p. 524.

15 Levon Abrahamian, 'Chaos and Cosmos…'.

16 Levon Abrahamian, 'Civil Society Born in the Square…'.

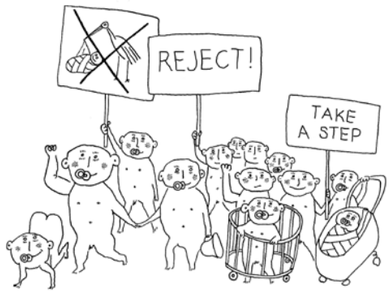


Image 17
Take a step: 'Velvet Revolution' in Armenia, April 2018
Image: Levon Abrahamian.

allegedly falsified presidential elections, his followers mainly the veterans of the Karabagh Movement, with less accentuated participation of the younger generation. Nevertheless the present-day prime minister Nikol Pashinyan, who was 34 in 2008, spent two years in prison for his active participation in these protests. Following protest movements, which we discussed earlier in this chapter, noticeably started to rejuvenate. Also, they became more democratic in their governing and gender representation. Such were the Mashtots public park protests in 2012 with absolutely young participants, mostly students. 'We pay 100 drams' protest actions in 2013 were even more 'rejuvenated'. The same could be said about 'Electric Yerevan' protests in 2015, where female participation was so active that for the first time young girls had the experience of dancing an exclusively male dance 'Berd' ('Fortress'), a two-storey circle dance, the second storey standing on the shoulders of the first-storey dancers. However, a real large-scale protest movement initially consisting of students of both sexes and even of schoolchildren was the 'Velvet Revolution' in 2018, its juvenile nature reflected in a cartoon by one of the authors of this chapter (Image 17). Soon, when people felt a threat of repeating the blood-shedding experience of 2008, in the words of Serzh Sargsyan the third president and one-week-long prime-minister, many elders of both sexes joined the young protesters. As a matter of fact, during daytime young people were realizing their protest actions, while at the everyday evening meetings elders joined them to learn about the results of the day passed and plans for the day to come. It is interesting how the present-day prime minister described in a little mythologizing way the ages of the 'Velvet Revolution' participants who joined the initial march of protesters from Gyumri to Yerevan. He said, 'In the capital Yerevan, at first numerous schoolchildren joined our movement, boys and girls, then their elder brothers and sisters came for them, then their moms and dads came for them, then also their grandmas and grandpas'.[17] The juvenile nature of the post-revolutionary ruling class became the topic of many jokes, one of the latest jokes referring to the celebration of Children's Defence Day on June 1, 2019, when children were invited into the garden in front of the Parliament building. The joke says that one could differentiate deputies by pins they wore on their dress. To crush the former corrupted regime young actors are needed who hopefully will 'grow up' a little to build a new state.

17 Nikol Pashinyan's speech in the European Parliament, Azatutyun, 11 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgjF3IzZsiU&t=42s> 9:48-10:51, accessed 7 July 2019.

03

A Contested Public Space:
Protest and Policing in Armenia

Nadja Douglas

This contribution focuses on the physical and symbolic interaction between civic protest and public order policing in Armenia. Social and political unrest during the last 15 years have demonstrated the destabilising potential of grievances and discontent in Armenian society, and the corresponding failure of authorities to adequately deal with this. Instead of dialogue, the former regime opted for suppression, especially by boosting the law enforcement sector. The alienation of society from the state eventually paved the way for the 'Velvet Revolution' and a (relatively) peaceful regime change. The aim of this piece is to delineate the contestation of urban space in Yerevan, notably by drawing on multiple examples of creative, festival-like, protest, as well as new forms of communication with officials. All of this is diametrically opposed to the traditional culture and techniques of public order policing in Armenia, which aim to disperse and intimidate. These dynamics can be seen as emblematic for state-society relations in Armenia, the transformation of which remains one of the major challenges facing the new Pashinyan regime.

Confidence in state institutions has traditionally been low in Armenia; trust in governmental structures reached a new low point in 2015.[1] Large parts of the population felt that they were treated unjustly, as opposed to the elites, who were brazenly enjoying more and more privileges. Social grievances and general discontent eventually translated into several protest waves during the last decade that, among others, addressed the provision of basic public services. One example was the hike in electricity prices, something that triggered the Electric Yerevan protests in summer 2015.[2] The fact that former President Serzh Sargsyan tried to prolong his political career by becoming re-elected as prime minister, caused things to boil over and paved the way for the 'Velvet Revolution' in spring 2018. Central for the relatively peaceful character of the regime change are notably three aspects: 1) The history of previous protest waves and the proven methods of young, creative and multifaceted protest culture; 2) the reluctance of the Armenian military to intervene in the unfolding events, as opposed to 2008;[3] 3) the evolution of the interaction between protesters and police and, related to that, the learning processes occurring on both sides. In this paper, I will focus on the third aspect and examine more closely how activists in their quest for the control of the public space have developed a counter-culture contrary to the predominant public order represented

1 'Trust Towards the Executive Government, data-set Armenia', CRRC-Georgia, 2017 <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-am/TRUEXEC/> accessed 24 August 2019.

2 The social protest wave cumulated in June–July 2015 in the Electric Yerevan protests, with tens of thousands of people demonstrating against a 17 per cent hike in the electricity rate in the streets of Yerevan and some other Armenian cities.

3 In the wake of the Armenian presidential elections in March 2008, protests were organised by supporters of the unsuccessful presidential candidate and first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who opposed the allegedly fraudulent election results. There was a mass mobilisation of thousands of demonstrators in Yerevan's Liberty Square, and on 1 March, after nine days of peaceful protests, national police, aided by the armed forces, suppressed the demonstrations with force and killed ten people.

by special police forces. Public space in this respect becomes not only an object of contestation, but also a scene of mobilisation. These diametrically opposed cultures of protest and public order policing in Armenia converged to the point that several police officers in the course of the 'Velvet Revolution' defected to the other side.

Changing Protest Dynamics

Recent protests in Armenia have been characterised by the fact that entrenched NGOs and civic initiatives had less a role to play than ad-hoc movements organised on social media networks. What has become more evident since 2015 and especially 2016 (when another protest episode took place in the context of the 'Erebuni hostage crisis'[4]) was the degree of violent contention between protesters and police. Armenian authorities used to react to civic initiatives and social protests in a rather predictable manner and with a variable mix of suppression and repression. Suppression before and during the protests included attempts by state authorities to impede any kind of media transmission about the events. There were also numerous examples of suppressing protests by discrediting organisers. Often, violent repression of protests led to the further escalation of protests. Human rights defenders in particular rejected the use of force and opposed it even more vehemently when it came from the side of the state: 'If the unlawful use of force occurs from the side of the state it is particularly despicable. A citizen can be mistaken [when using violent means] and can therefore be prosecuted, but if the crime is committed by the state it is unbearable'.[5]

According to activists and experts,[6] the dynamics of protest activities and the nature of the citizen-police-relationship changed in 2017. Protests became much more creative and multifaceted. The ideology of non-violent resistance had been absorbed by the activist scene in Armenia. Especially during Electric Yerevan, the lesson was learned: do not harm the police but, on the contrary, engage them as brothers who are fighting for the same cause. On the central protest site, Baghramyan street, protesters decided to hand policemen flowers, and even water and food. There were also some loud calls: 'We don't have anything against you, you shouldn't have anything against us – it's our common struggle'.[7] Protest activities became gradually more politicised. Many of the former social protests were driven by concrete demands concerning basic public services (e.g. the movement against rising public transportation costs ('100 Dram') in 2013, the pension reform protest in 2014, and eventually the Electric Yerevan protests in 2015), which by and large did not imply a direct critique of state institutions or call for a political revolution. One activist illustrated the path of politicisation and the part that police has in this: 'In the beginning it is what I would call a one-thing oriented protest, when you say that "I'm not talking about politics, I'm not talking about systemic changes. I need this one concrete thing to be changed". That's the first step the activist does. Then he reaches a point where he sees that this one thing cannot be changed if not a whole bunch of other things also change. He comes to the conclusion that "yeah, it is political, it is systemic change that is needed". Usually, that happens after being beaten up or after seeing a brutal demonstration of force by law enforcement bodies'.[8]

What has not changed during the various waves of protest is the peaceful nature of resistance. Several interlocutors explained this with reference to the Armenian mentality: 'It is obvious. During these days of protests [the Erebuni hostage crisis] they [the police] could not find a single weapon not with one demonstrator. And don't think they have not searched for [them.] They could not find anything, although they would have liked to'.[9] In the aftermath of the protest cycle of 2015–2016, several grassroots initiatives and newly emerged NGOs began campaigns to inform citizens of their rights related to peaceful protest, related to police and security bodies, what to do when getting arrested etc.[10]

During the *Merzhir Serzhin*[11] protests in April 2018, the police responded accordingly. Although the police initially scattered protesters, used stun grenades and detained hundreds of demonstrators, they could not keep pace with decentralised protest events, which were organised in a rapid manner to paralyse the entire capital of Yerevan. Despite having been arrested temporarily in the course of events, the opposition leader at the time, Nikol Pashinyan, repeatedly called upon the activists to face the police in a peaceful manner.[12] Activists handed out leaflets, among other things, on how to engage with the police (Image 1). At the same time, the police, despite being stuck in rigid structures, were said to have changed their tactics as well: 'They became smarter. They know when and what should be done to, let's say, have the result they want but to avoid accusations of being tough'.[13] Moreover, activists recall that even during the

4 A group of gunmen called Sasna Tsrer carried out an armed attack on a patrol-guard police station in the Erebuni district of Yerevan on 17 July 2016. The most violent clashes between police and protesters occurred on 20 and 29 July. During the unfolding events, three people were killed.

5 Interview with Artur Sakunts, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor, Yerevan, 7 and 12 April 2017.

6 Interviews were conducted by the author with various interlocutors in Yerevan in spring 2017. They included local activists involved in protest activities and contention with police, representatives of civic organisations, intergovernmental organisations, the media, the expert community, and lawyer associations dealing with police and law enforcement structures.

7 Interview with activist, Human Rights Power, 12 April 2017.

8 Interview with Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Eurasian Partnership Foundation, Yerevan, 12 April 2017.

9 Interview with Artur Sakunts, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor, Yerevan, 7 and 12 April 2017.

10 Interview with Daniel Ioannisyan, Union of Informed Citizens, Yerevan, 10 April 2017.

11 Merzhir Serzhin translates as 'Reject Serzh'.

12 Pashinyan himself sent out conciliatory signals when he shook hands with the chief of Yerevan Police, Valeriy Osipyan, on 30 April 2018. 'Demourian, Avet, 'Armenians Set to Cast Ballots in Snap Parliamentary Vote', 680News, 7 December 2018. <https://www.680news.com/2018/12/07/armenians-set-to-cast-ballots-in-snap-parliamentary-vote/> accessed 24 August 2019.

13 Interview with Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Eurasian Partnership Foundation, Yerevan, 12 April 2017.

Image 1
How to protect yourself from police violence during protests
In case of tear gas

1. Don't become a direct target of attack; protect head and chest.
2. Wear clothes from natural material, which will protect the skin and not restrict movements.
3. Wear anti-gas or any protective mask.
4. Protect nose and eyes (best option: vinegar) with wet porous material (scarf, bandana).
5. If eyes are burning have some milk to hand and wash eyes with milk.
6. Make lotion with vinegar and touch it to lips and nose.

Olya Asatyan

14 Interview with Daniel Ioannisyan, Union of Informed Citizens, Yerevan, 10 April 2017.

15 The average age in Armenia is 35.6 years (in comparison in Germany 47 years). Plecher, H., 'Armenia: Average Age of the Population', Statista, 17 July 2019 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/440071/average-age-of-the-population-in-armenia/> accessed 24 August 2019.

16 Interview with Artak Kirakosyan, Civil Society Institute, Yerevan, 10 April 2017.

17 Interview with Richard Giragosian, Regional Studies Centre, Yerevan, 6 April 2017.

18 Hofstra, Carel. 'Police Development Activities of the OSCE in Armenia', *OSCE Yearbook*, 201, vol. 17, pp. 151–61, here p. 151.

19 Douglas, Nadja. 'The Culture of Policing in Armenia', ZOiS Report, volume 3, 2018, p. 17. <https://www.zois-berlin.de/fileadmin/media/Dateien/ZOiS_Reports/ZOiS_Report_3_2018.pdf> accessed 24 August 2019.

2016 Erebuni events: 'the authorities were trying to act very smoothly in order not to make people angry … People were forcing the police not to do anything…'[14]

Future Emancipation versus Soviet Past

Characteristic of late social protests in Armenia is the high proportion of young people in the streets. One of the reasons may be that Armenia has a relatively young population.[15] Another reason is that people were frustrated with the 'old elites'. Those generations that had been formed by Soviet legacies had somehow resigned and younger generations took over trying to find their own way of changing things.[16] In contrast to their parent or grandparent generation, they make use of modern technology (social media) to get connected and organised. Also, there were more and more young Armenians that went to study in Europe and the United States and – unlike previous generations – many decided to come back and play a notable role in driving the new sense of activism.[17]
These young people were then often confronted with police forces that, in turn, were guided by commanders stuck in an old style of thinking and partly trained during Soviet times. The Armenian police culture was and still is characterised by a high degree of centralisation and hierarchy, a deficient application of human rights standards and a rigid educational structure that overemphasises legalism over practical knowledge and basic public-order management skills.[18] Despite a lack of a coherent post-socialist style of policing, in many former Soviet contexts traditionalists often continue to have a greater say as reformers that recognise the organisation of demonstration as a fundamental right. Therefore, the police were resilient to reforms for a long time. Another noticeable result was that young people in Armenia in recent years had a tendency to feel less intimidated and vulnerable to police arbitrariness and are therefore more willing to engage in social protest in order to express their will publicly[19].

Horizontal Self-Organisation and Communication Tactics

In reaction to allegations that protests were overall an orchestrated campaign that served completely different purposes, activists rather placed an emphasis on how they were organised in order to prove such allegations

wrong. Despite the odd authoritarian tendencies noticeable during each protest, a characteristic feature became the horizontal self-organisation of people with regard to holding assemblies, providing food and organising cultural happenings. For several weeks each time in both 2015 and 2018, masses of people organised themselves in the central streets of Yerevan in a festival-like setting and considered how best to maintain the momentum. One particular strategy that emerged during the Electric Yerevan protests, exercised also during the 2018 protests, was to establish a street-based counter-culture during demonstrations. This practice not only distinguished the protest from mainstream political culture as represented by the former regime but also from the hierarchical structures within the police itself. Decisions were made by consensus in terms of the already mentioned horizontal and decentralised organisation and relations. Thus, the police did not know where and by whom decisions were made: 'This was a cultural problem for them. They just started thinking about new methods and about how to become active on social networks'.[20]

The police also tried to be proactive. As one observer and activist recalled from the Electric Yerevan protests: 'One day, Vladimir Gasparyan, the [former] chief of the Armenian police, tried to enter into a dialogue with the protesters in order to appeal to their sense of patriotism. He made an attempt to address the crowd to abandon the central Baghramyan street, claiming that, as Armenia is a small country, she could not afford these kind of upheavals. Although many people decided to obey and leave the street, hundreds just remained seated there'.[21] Also in 2018, there were direct communication links between demonstrators and police forces.[22] For protesters, the behaviour and communicative efforts of the police often remained unpredictable and arbitrary. One day they were allowed to protest on one street; another day the same street was banned for protests for one group but possible for another group.[23] However, what they were all aware of was that certain symbolic locations in the city were generally banned for protest, such as the area surrounding the presidential building in Yerevan. As several activists reported, numerous policemen were intimidated by the bold behaviour of protesters in recent years. Apparently, they embarrassed themselves with an open display of weakness. Both rank and file police became very reluctant to use force as they were ordered. According to observers, this was due to the fact that the protests were humanised and smart: 'There was music, celebration, flowers'.[24] During Electric Yerevan, some activists 'saw fear in the eyes of the chief of the police, who was there to represent the system, whereas for the last twenty years he was able to do whatever he wanted to'.[25] This fear spread to the government and in 2018 this fear eventually overpowered newly elected Prime Minister Sargsyan and made him resign.

Conclusion

Especially during times of protest and upheaval, the police are seen as the most visible manifestation of government authority and their performance usually influences perceptions of the state and government.[26] The various protest waves in Armenia have shaped state-society relations through both the evolving culture of policing and the changing attitudes and emancipation of societal groups, in particular of young people. Protests gained momentum after they had become more political and after the authorities had to back down and make concessions more frequently, which meant a huge success for civic initiatives. The quest for sovereignty and the defining prerogative over the public space between police and citizenry became emblematic for state-society relations in Armenia. Law enforcement authorities, especially riot police, have, until the present day, not developed as predicted and intended by international donors who have financed police reform for many years. Nevertheless, a learning process within the police started after the protest wave in 2015–2016 and activists started to engage more proactively with police forces during the 'Velvet Revolution'. As soon as he was elected, Pashinyan began to fight corruption within the state power institutions by inter alia replacing the Chief of the National Police as early as May 2018. As a consequence, public perception of and notably confidence in the police considerably improved in 2018.[27] A thorough reform process will nevertheless take more time and efforts. It is now up to the Pashinyan government to learn the lessons from the past and reform the law enforcement agency, especially public order police, so that in the future, as Pashinyan put it, 'the police will respect the people and the people the police'.[28]

20 Interview with activist and political scientist, Yerevan, 11 April 2017.

21 Interview with activist and political scientist, Yerevan, 11 April 2017.

22 <https://news.am/rus/news/447515.html>

23 Interview with Artak Kirakosyan, Civil Society Institute, Yerevan, 10 April 2017.

24 Interview with Richard Giragosian, Regional Studies Centre, Yerevan, 6 April 2017.

25 Interview with researcher, American University Armenia, Yerevan, 7 April 2017.

26 Hofstra, Carel. 'Police Development Activities of the OSCE in Armenia', *OSCE Yearbook*, 2012, vol. 17, pp. 151–161, here p. 151.

27 'Trust Towards the Executive Government, data-set Armenia', CRRC-Georgia, 2017 <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-am/TRUEXEC/> accessed 24 August 2019.

28 Radio Svoboda, 'The People are Learning to Walk: A Velvet Revolution has Prevailed in Armenia, 23 April 2018. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29187373.html> accessed 26 August 2019.

04

The Emancipation of Citizens:
‘New Urban Activism’ in St. Petersburg

Oleg Pachenkov, Lilia Voronkova

Grassroots activities connected to urban development have grown in the last decade in the Russian metropoles of St. Petersburg and Moscow, and in other big Russian cities. A new urban activism has emerged. It is marked by projects of productive Do-It-Yourself urbanism, flexible and project-oriented cooperation and ‘strategic’ thinking (Do-It-With-Others urbanism) as well as horizontal non-hierarchical forms of self-organisation. A cohesive self-identity appears to be emerging among a new type of activists. Based on both research[1] and insider experiences as consultants for activist groups, we examine a new mode of urban activism in the case of St. Petersburg.

‘Productive’ Urban Activism

Since the beginning of the twenty first century, Russian cities have witnessed a serious increase in all sorts of protest movements. In St. Petersburg, where the historic and architectural heritage is a key element of local identity, heritage protection movements have played a significant role. Groups like ‘Live City’ (*Zhivoi gorod*) and *Ecom*, as well as other grassroots initiatives, have actively participated in setting the cultural capital of Russia.[2] Most of their activities were directed against developers and construction companies in order to ‘restrict’ the demolition of cultural heritage. For a long time, a protective modus seemed to be the predominant mode of urban grassroots activism. Since the end of 2000s, a new type of activism has been emerging, one that is constructive in character. Occurring first in Moscow and then in St. Petersburg, these initiatives focus on ecological issues of urban development, a healthy lifestyle or cycling infrastructure. Examples are the initiatives such as ‘No more trash’[3] (*Musora bolshe net*) and ‘Let’s bike it’.[4] They are based on the idea that the city belongs to its dwellers, ‘city-zens’, and therefore ‘any of them is able to change the urban environment’[5].

DIY (Do-It-Yourself) has become a popular modus operandi among the urban activists. In 2012, several grassroots initiatives united under the umbrella of the ‘DIY marathon’ (Delai sam) in St. Petersburg. In the words of the curator of the first DIY marathon in St. Petersburg, Mikhail Klimovskiy:

The Marathon is aimed at showing how easy it is to change the space around you; how to set up an urban garden on the roof of a prefabricated high-rise,

1 This text is partly based on the results of two research projects realised in 2016–2018: a study funded by Russian RSSF according to the research project № 16-03-00508, ‘The Quality of Urban Space: Vectors of Civil Initiative Groups Development in Russia and Germany’, and a research project ‘Claiming the Public Space’ funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

2 Gladarev, Boris, ‘Istoriko-kulturnoe nasledie Peterburga: rozhdenie obschestvennosti iz duha goroda’ [‘The historical-cultural inheritance of St. Petersburg’], in Kharkhordin, Oleg (ed.), *Ot obschestvennogo k publichnomu: kollektivnaya monografia* [*From societal to public: A collective monograph*] (St. Petersburg, European University in St. Petersburg publishers, 2011), pp. 69 –304.

Kleman, Karin, and Miryasova, Olga, and Demidov, Andrey, *Ot obyvateley k aktivistam: Zarozhdayuschiesya sotzialnye dvizheniya v sovremennoy Rossii* (*From ordinary people to activists: The birth of social movements in modern Russia*], (Moskva: Evropa, 2010).

Tykanova, Elena and Moscaleva, Svetlana, ‘Sotzialnye usloviya deyatelnosti grazhdanskih i expertnyh grupp po uluchsheniyu kachestva gorodskoy sredy’ [‘Social conditions behind the activities of citizen and expert groups aiming to improve the urban environment’], *Zhurnal sotziologii i sotzialnoy antropologii* [*The journal of sociology and social antropology*], no. 19 (2016), pp. 103–120.

3 Various authors, *Delai sam/a. Praktiki nizovykh grazhdanskikh initsiativ* [*Do-it-Yourself: Practices of grassroots initiatives*] (Moskow: Pero, 2017), p. 184.

4 Ibid., p. 110.

5 Violetta Riyabko, ‘Guide to the ‘DIY Marathon’, The Village’, 27 April 2012. <https://www.the-village.ru/village/city/chain-reaction/113145-v-nachale-maya-v-peterburge-proydyot-festival-delay-sam?utm_campaign=editorial-widgets&utm_medium=village&utm_source=readmore> accessed 17 Sept 2019.

Photo 1
'Veloden' ('Bicycling day'), 27 May 2018. Action was performed by participants of the initiative 'Velosipedizatsiya of St. Petersburg' – civic movement for the development of bicycling infrastructure in the city. Today the initiative includes 19,390 people.
Author: Ilin, Andrei.

how to plant trees in the yard. This is a new model of urban development that became a trend and has been demonstrated worldwide in the recent decades – the construction of the urban environment by the efforts of city-zens[6] *themselves. The best cities in the world provide better conditions for experiments, uniting people who are interested in changing city space around them.*[7]

20 grassroots initiatives took part in the DIY marathon in St. Petersburg in 2012. Most of them represented self-directed activities aimed at productive changes in urban environment leading to the creation of new things in the city such as street art, urban furniture made of trash, urban gardening, guerrilla drawings and bike paths.

Gradually, a new approach in urban activism emerged, whereby productive activities in urban activism result in protective initiatives. Maria Tinika – participant of '*Derev'ya Peterburga*' – described the relation between this new initiative with the well-known initiative '*Zelenaya Koalitsiya*' as follows: *'You know, I do many things "for", I prefer activities aimed at creation, bringing more people to the streets, etc. While "Green coalition" does good and important things, they protect trees from demolition, but their activity is "against" something or somebody, and I do things "for"; you see the difference?'*[8]

More Strategic than Tactical Activism

St. Petersburg has experienced a number of DIY projects and objects of all sorts, from street and public art or urban furniture, to bicycle parades and flash-mob actions like a 'pillow fight' in city public spaces.[9] DIY initiatives, on the one hand, made visible and significant changes in the city. On the other hand, they affected the people who became aware of their rights and abilities. Yet, the new urban activists also noticed the limitations of their tactical actions' output. They developed a different sense of scale for urban change and decision-making upon it. They wished to act at the strategic level[10] – the interaction and decision-making of politicians and (big) business in the corridors of the bureaucratic system, laid down in planning documents and legislation.

In St. Petersburg, the limitations of tactical DIY actions were recognised when the city government announced a programme to transform the river embankments of the historic city centre – large-scale projects were planned that could not be affected and changed by tactical actions significantly. Thus, the new activists decided to act on all scales. In the case of Smolenka river, the activists of the 'Park on Smolenka' movement used the conflict between the executive power (the city government that gave permission to build on part of the embankment) and the deputies in the city council opposing the 'United Russia' party. The activists got support from the oppositional deputies of 'Yabloko' and 'Just Russia', and finally – due to this increased pressure – even the majority of 'United Russia' in the city parliament opted to deny the developers of building permission. In parallel, activists used the mechanisms of the official participatory budgeting project 'Your budget'. Affiliated with the city government, this project is steered by independent consultants based in universities who are close to the urban activist community (including the authors of this text). Activists became increasingly involved in this project in order to force the city government to start the planning process for the development of the river embankment, which would consider the suggestions of the 'Park on Smolenka' movement. Finally, the employees of the district and city administration established a stable dialogue with activists about the reconstruction of the Smolenka riverside. Thus, the activists worked within the system of 'big politics', but still strived for their wishes and concerns and managed to convince the politicians involved.

6 This is the meaning of *gorozhane* (горожане, city-zens), which differs in Russian form the word *grazhdane* (граждане, - citizens). In the discourse examined here, this difference is reflected in, for example, such expressions as 'From a city-zen to a citizen' (*Ot gorozhanina - k grazhdaninu*). So this difference could be conceptualised as a growth of responsibility and ability to care about the common, public good and participate in political life.

7 Riyabko (ibid).

8 Public discussion devoted to city public spaces at the exhibition 'World of architecture and design', 6 April 2019 at 'Sevkabel Port' cultural space in St. Petersburg.

9 Other big cities in Russia have experienced this too. For an anthology of these projects see: *Delai sam/a. Praktiki nizovykh grazhdanskikh initsiativ* (Moskow: Pero, 2017).

10 De Certeau, Michael, *The Sociology of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

Shortly after that – also due to the pressure by the 'Park on Smolenka' group – the city authorities launched a project for 'pedestrian lanes' along the embankments in the city centre. The activist community suggested designing multi-functional public spaces instead of beautified pedestrian lanes serving aesthetics and walking only. Therefore, several activists established the initiative 'Friends of Karpovka'. They invited external experts, including young architects, and initiated a pre-planning research project. They were also supported by the head of the city district who requested a development concept for the Karpovka river. The concept was then submitted to the city government with the hope of guiding future planning activities. Apart from that, the activists organised a series of participatory planning sessions and urged the architectural office, which was supposed to plan the riverside, to participate and listen to the wishes and ideas of the local residents.

These and many other examples demonstrate how new urban activists – to a higher extent than their 'classic' civil society predecessor from 1990s – are keen to engage in dialogue with the public authorities, professional politicians and even with business as far as it serves their aims, values and principles. A comfortable, high quality, attractive and productive urban environment is one of their valued principles, instead of a categorical and stable confrontation and 'no deal' policy with public authorities. The new activists do not consider themselves as political 'collaborators' in the sense of betraying their values, since they pursue them but think and act according to a different political logic. Besides or because of their collaboration with authorities, which seem unusual for grassroots initiatives, new urban activists tend to be as transparent and open as possible in their claims, actions and decisions. They explain themselves in social networks like 'Vkontakte', for example.

The dialogue with public authorities implies that new urban activists are competent in city management and understand the specificities and details of bureaucratic work as well as business logic. This knowledge allows them work with(in) the bureaucratic machine in order to reach their goals and realise what they believe is good for the city and people. We argue that new activists see no problem with combining actions at 'tactical' and 'strategic' levels. New urban activists try to intervene in the decision-making processes on urban development. This intervention implies neither revolution, nor giving up tactical resistance at micro level of urban

practice, for example, in the form of DIY-urbanism. In other words, these approaches coexist in the new urban activism.

Towards a 'New' Cohesive and Solidarity-Based Identity of Activists

Karl Marx distinguished 'class in itself' – a group of people sharing a position in relation to the means of production, i.e. a group that is defined by external processes, from 'class for itself' – as a conscious class marked by internal cohesion and solidarity. The latter is capable of developing a conception of its interests and power.[11] Certain conditions, including pressure from the outside, lead to the transformation of an internally cohesive class into one based in solidarity. In our opinion, such a transformation has happened in the recent years (after 2010) to the new urban activists in big Russian cities, at least in Moscow and St. Petersburg. They have transformed into a group that perceives itself as such, as a group of people with their particular interest, their unique role in the city development: 'New urban activism for itself' has emerged. The self-consciousness of the new activists implies the understanding of their own agenda, their particular aims. These goals and tasks that are important for them as a group and for the city and its citizens. Their values seem to be concentrated around the quality of the urban environment and leftist principles of justice, accessibility and significance of public space and public life; of 'cities for people' and with a 'right to the city' for all.

The readiness to collaborate with each other, i.e. with 'people like them' as well as with 'other' actors in the field of urban planning and development, is another constitutive feature for the activists' 'meta-vision' of themselves as a group. For example, in 2017, when city government announced its plans to re-develop one of the central squares in the city, Sennaya Ploschad, activists from the '*Krasiviy Peterburg*', '*Gorodskie proekti, Peterburg*' and '*Otkritaya Laboratoriya Gorod. OLG*' initiatives united their efforts. They carried out a self-initiated online inquiry in order to learn more about the actual uses of this area and the city dwellers' opinions and wishes for the square's future development. Knowing that the city government would never do such research itself,[12] they reported the inquiry results to the city government and a wider public.

Soon after the DIY stage, the new activists moved towards the 'Do It With Others' approach (DIWO) – also due to the international contacts and communication with new urban activists in Europe, who had started this new direction in activism earlier, and influenced Russian grassroots initiatives. Meetings, communication, united efforts, festivals and joint projects made the new urban activists look at themselves 'from the outside'. This 'meta-vision' helped them to understand their difference from the other actors in urban development – authorities, business, architects and planners. They even seem to distinguish themselves from the activists of previous generations. The latter were formed in the late Soviet times or in 1990s and saw themselves as struggling against a 'bloodstained communist regime' (and many extrapolated this attitude to Putin's regime as well). They are represented mainly by NGOs registered in 1990s. While these 'classic' post-socialist activist movements built a strong boundary between themselves and 'authorities', the new activists seem to consider this opposition as irrelevant and have, in many ways, overcome it. New activists do not stay on this or another side of a barricade as they do not build barricades, but urban furniture and open-air stages in order to attract people and public spaces.

Partly, this transformation was stimulated by the growth of competence and professionalisation of new activists. Along with architects and urban planners, city managers and development business, the new activists participated in forming a new realm of public debate around urban issues – in media, in public lectures and workshops as well as at conferences and forums.[13] They participated in and initiated series of public events where new approaches and innovative knowledge in the field of urban environmental development were discussed. Many of them joined the trendy field of 'urbanistics' by the means of educational programmes [14] at the intersection of architecture, urban planning, urban design and urban studies. Thus, activists gained professional knowledge, new skills and wider perspectives. They started intervening in the decision-making of urban development with their ideas and agendas. While staying grassroots activists, they started collaborating and competing with traditional experts of urban development in this field, such as architects, planners, city managers. Today their expertise has been partly acknowledged. In 2015 in St. Petersburg, for example, Dariya Tabachnikova – one of the leaders of the grassroots bike activist movement '*Velosipedisation*'– was invited to become an advisor of a vice-governor responsible for urban planning and bicycling infrastructure. Similarly, in 2017 representatives of the grassroots

11 Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Chicago 1945).

12 'Gorozhan prosyat predlozhit' svoi varianty blagoustoystva na Sennoy' [city-zens offer their version of reconstructing Sennaya], Fotanka.ru, 5 May 2016, <http://m.fontanka.ru/2016/12/05/145/> accessed 17 Sept 2019.

13 Take, for example, the Moscow Urban Forum started in 2012 or the St. Petersburg Forum for Spatial Development, which has been active since 2015.

14 For instance, activists studied at the private 'STRELKA' institute or the Higher School of Urbanistics in Moscow, at the private 'Sreda' institute, the Smolny College of Liberal Arts and Science or the European University at St. Petersburg.

initiative '*Krasiviy Peterburg*' became part of the jury for the competition for the park concept of the historic city centre. In 2016, they had participated with project ideas in a similar, official competition for developing a pedestrian zone concept for the historic street, *Bolshaya Morskaya*.

Agile and Ephemeral Self-Organisation: Project-Oriented Activities, Horizontal Networks and the Playful Actions of the New Activists

Shifts toward a meta-vision of themselves as activists resulted in a corresponding desire for meta-organisations. Several attempts at organisational unification were made. One of the first tries was the 'Open Urban Lab' (OUL) established in 2011. It emerged as an 'offline platform' for a quasi-professional group of people interested in realizing cross-disciplinary projects in urban studies, design and planning. The OUL, with members of different disciplines and organisations (including universities and architectural and planning studios), worked as a grassroots initiative. Anyone who shared the formulated values and approaches (as listed above) could become a member of OUL. There was no formal organisation or legal entity, just a website and a pool of people, who meet, discuss and gather in flexible teams to work on specific projects. Often the projects are research and studies or events. Most often the teams work for free for the sake of the public good and the idea to turn St. Petersburg into a comfortable city for people with accessible water and all sorts of public spaces,[15] avoiding urban sprawl and car-oriented city planning. Several attempts to formalise the OUL, such as defining an organisational core, registering as an NGO, or getting staff paid on a regular basis, failed due to a lack of support from OUL participants. Being always busy in various projects, they prefer to use OUL as a name and access point to a network of people who share some professional and ethical attitudes in the sphere of urbanistics. OUL thus continues to exist as platform and network of people without any legal and registered form, but with the slogan: 'They cannot destroy us – for we do not exist'.

The popularity of such quasi-organisational forms of cooperation among new urban activist movements proves their effectiveness. Unlike their predecessors of the 1990s and early 2000s, the new activists of 2010s rarely register as NGOs, but prefer to be communities, groups, networks and associations of individuals without any formal membership, statutes and stable

15 As it was formulated in the project 'SAGA: Public Space in Transformation' (carried out 2013–2014 by OUL in collaboration with the Leontief Centre, the 'Gehl architects' and the Council of Saint Petersburg municipal units): the objective is to create smart, accessible, green and attractive public spaces: <http://www.saga.leontief-centre.ru/?lang=l2> accessed 17 Sept 2019.

Photo 2
Festival 'Segodnya mozhno' ('Today you may'), 12 August 2018. Festival was aimed at bringing attention to the accessibility of river banks by pedestrians. Festival was based on the principles of 'self organisation', sharing and peer-to-peer management. It united 600 active participants representing 55 different activist projects and initiatives, who became participants and co-organisers of the festival.
Author: Danko, Natalia.

organisational structures. The key element of their activity is to plan projects and actions, and to update each other about them. Therefore, social media and networks like Facebook or Vkontakte are crucial for circulating information as well as to act and coordinate quickly. Membership in groups here is the only factor that matters. In cases when activists need a legal entity for signing contracts (in order to receive money for the realisation of a specific project), one of the group registers as a so called 'individual entrepreneur' – the simplest legal entity in the Russian Federation that allows for economic activities. Thus, the self-organisation of the new activists resembles the 'Lego' construction set and follows an ephemeral logic: individuals get together and organise flexibly to realise one specific project, allowing various combinations and constructions each time. Once the specific project is over, the team dismantles and the people reassemble for the next project. Even though one activist often participates in several teams and projects at the same time, none of the teams is the same; in each team some people overlap, some are different.

The new activists experiment with agile and horizontal structures of self-organisation. They reject the hierarchical formats of classical project management implying the 'leader', who formulates missions, goals and tasks, and 'workers' who perform those tasks. They prefer distributing leadership and other roles amongst themselves. They pursue a deliberative

Photo 3
Second festival 'Alive streets'. 20 August 2017. Festival is aimed at highlighting the potential of public spaces and public activities. It was one of the first grand-scale festivals in the city organised by active citizens on a 'bottom up' principle and later on supported by the government. Photograph shows a 'Non-formal lectorium' that took place within the frame of festival: a peer- to-peer based edutainment space, referring to the idea of Guide park and free speech.
Author: Voronkova, Lilia.

Photo 4
Festival 'Your water', 29 July 2017. Festival was aimed at drawing attention to the 'right to the water' and at the development of waterfront infrastructure – for the support of water sports and other activities taking place near the water and on the water.
Author: Savina, Olga.

decision-making model for strategic questions. Thus, decisions are the result of consensus – either total agreement or compromise among the project team members. All participants are treated as equal. Key resources in this model are mutual trust, responsibility and the skills of dialogue and compromise.[16] The new activists and project teams work in a 'redistributed', i.e. peer-to-peer, model without a single decision-making centre. The model guarantees that the loss of one link does not destroy the whole chain and result in the projects' failure – a risk that seems high in informal and agile forms of organisation. One popular initiative in St. Petersburg using this model of project organisation is *'Trava'* (23,600 participants in social media).[17]

Light organisational formats, horizontal approaches in management, the application of peer-to-peer models and the sharing of principles make new activist initiatives creative, playful and inviting. The new urban activists do not change the surrounding world by means of destruction and open protests, but by adding new meanings, playing with what is taken for granted, compromising with common sense by forming attractive images of new values and ideas they promote and making them 'cool'. In this vein, festivals became one of the most popular formats of the new urban activists. This is a legalised (and legitimate in the eyes of activists themselves) way of going out into the open city space and transforming it into a public one, even if only for limited time.

Between 2016–2018, St. Petersburg experienced a boom of festivals organised by new urban activists: *'Zhivie ulitsy'* (2016, 2017, 2018), *'Tvoi dvor'* (2017, 2018), *'Segodny'a mojno!'* (2018) and many others. Keeping the form of a city holiday, new urban festivals have changed its meaning and consequences. Now this is not just a fun day, nor leisure time built around entertainment and passive consumption, but a critical and, thus, political action. These festivals in open urban spaces voice new demands and critical debates on awkward issues like LGBT rights or the rights of migrants. They include educational activities (like open public lectures, master-classes), interactions with the audience and visitors, e.g. in craft workshops or even quasi-sessions of participatory planning for sites in the city that activists are concerned about. These festivals are an extension of the new activists' way of performing activities, a way of highlighting issues that activists-organisers wish to draw public attention to.

For example, in 2016 a group of activists concerned about access to water in St. Petersburg founded the initiative *'Pravo na vodu'*: 'The goal of our

16 See principles of peer to peer project management formulated by the participants of the project Urban Dialog <http://urbandialog.org/p2p-eng> accessed 17 Sept 2019.

17 <https://vk.com/travaeducation> accessed 17 Sept 2019.

community is to [re]vitalise the in-city water activities with the power of citizens and by the means of events, communication, study and improvement of legislation'.[18] In 2017, the festival *'Tvoya voda'* (2017) brought together all people involved in the various water-related activities in the city. They united their efforts and established the Water Sports Association of St. Petersburg. Later a new grass-root initiative[19] aimed at protecting and developing a yacht club in the city, opened for the wider public. The activist festival of 2017 and subsequent festivals around water drew wider public attention to the issue of urban waterfronts and resulted in growing popularity for all sorts of water-related activities (leisure and sports) on the shores of St. Petersburg's rivers, canals and the Finnish gulf. New activists understood the 'right to the water' as a part of the 'right to the city', mobilising citizens to reclaim their rights. The activists pushed the city government to start thinking about a new approach to the near-water territories in St. Petersburg.

Conclusion: the City Space as a Cause and Consequence of the Transformation of Public, Political Sphere

In this chapter, we have described the development and features of one form of activism emerging in the 2010s in big Russian cities: what we term the 'new urban activism'. In our opinion, its emergence and development reflect changes and new features in society as a whole. New urban activism looks quite natural in large cities full of highly educated people, experiencing 'liquid modernity',[20] enjoying the sharing economy while observing the decay of representative democracy in neo-liberal states, and, at the same time, coming to realise their own potential and power. All this implies the demand for self-realisation and reclaiming the 'right to the city'. However, we believe that what is underway is not just the formation of a new type of activism, but a much deeper, new 'structural transformation' of the public sphere and the political realm in post-socialist Russia. Thus, a 'spatial-political turn' is occurring in Russia's large cities. By spatial-political turn, we mean that the city and urban spaces are becoming a platform that allows a new form of political relations to come into existence. The fact that new activists rarely go into the 'big' or 'real' politics[21] and often passively participate in the traditional institutions of representative democracy does not mean they are apolitical. It only proves that they act in a different part of the political realm. The new activists' activities are perhaps even the most political thing ever, namely in the very original, ancient meaning of *politika*, originating from *polis*, which means city.

This process is, in our opinion, a current variety of what Immanuel Kant called a 'man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage':[22] an 'emancipation' of a human being, of a 'city-zen' who learns to overcome personal or corporate interests and take care of public good, thus transforming into responsible citizens. The new urban activists are such people (citizens), forming a new public sphere in our cities. The urban space is cause and product of this formation process: being an ultimate *res publica* (a common issue) it provokes public activity, which itself targets improvement of the quality of certain urban places of recognised public value. From this point of view, blaming new activists for being 'apolitical' seems to be unjust. It is quite the opposite: the new activists are currently forming the new field of public politics, where the political is understood in the terms of Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas.[23]

18 Web site of the initiative 'Pravo na vodu' ('Right to the Water'), 2017: <http://pravonavodu.ru/> accessed 17 Sept 2019.

19 The Voluntary St. Petersburg Yacht Club: <https://vk.com/volontersbryc> accessed 17 Sept 2019.

20 Baumann, Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

21 We refer here to the so called 'realistic' understanding of political formulated by Karl Schmitt in terms of enemy, enmity and war. See: Schmitt, Carl, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

22 Kant, Immanuel. 'What is Enlightment?' in Kant, Immanuel, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge 1996). (*Was ist Aufklärung?*, written in 1784, first published in 1789).

23 Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition* (Chicago 1958); Habermas, Jurgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Burger, Thomas and Lawrence, Frederick (trans.) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

05

Urban Activism and Citizenship Under Post-Soviet Conditions:
The Muscovites' Struggle for Public Space

Christian Fröhlich

The societal transformations in the wake of fall of the Soviet Union were particularly pronounced in cities, which moved from central long-term planning towards a market-city model based on private ownership.[1] While this has affected the shape of post-Soviet cities as well as the relationship between public authorities and urban residents, it has also had a deep impact on urban residents' relation to the public spaces that belong to their housing environment. As a result, citizens protect more actively their living environment from intrusion by the state and businesses. Thus, Russian neighbourhood struggles become greenhouses for the growth of post-Soviet active citizenship.

Public space is restricted for demonstrations criticizing the state, and many oppositional activists are persecuted and repressed. Despite this trend, neighbourhood initiatives in Moscow display public dissent in order to secure the right of residents to participate in decision-making concerning the public spaces that surround their homes. Those localised forms of urban protest offer a chance to participate in new solidarity-based collective identities and forms of active citizenship.

Urban Regime and Citizenship in Post-Soviet Space

Moscow is the leading Russian city in the liberalisation of urban policy and development, putting a strong emphasis on maximising profits from the utilisation of constant population and capital growth.[2] Moscow's city government has followed an entrepreneurial strategy since the 1990s, while pursuing its own entrepreneurial interests and privileging business interests over the interests of residents.[3] Moscow's urban governance regime has therefore been characterised as combining the neoliberal focus on depoliticised consumption with centralised control and exclusion of residents from decision-making.[4] But it is this institutional reticence that increasingly sparks residents' dissent.

The end of the Soviet Union changed the nature and meaning of citizenship related to public space. On the one hand, housing, public services and transportation, as well as public spaces were reshaped by neoliberal urban development and exposed to extreme levels of privatisation.[5] Russian citizens became housing property owners overnight due to a sudden and extensive privatisation policy in 1991,[6] which strengthened their perceived civic responsibility for the environment beyond their apartments.[7] Thus,

1 Tosics, I, 'City Development in Central and Eastern Europe Since 1990: the Impact of Internal Forces', in Hamilton, F. E. I., Andrews, K. D., and Pichler-Milanović, N. (eds), *Transformation of Cities in Central and Eastern Europe: Towards Globalisation* (New York 2005), pp. 44–79.

2 Makhrova, A., and Golubchikov, O., Rossiyskiy gorod v usloviyakh kapitalisma: sotsialnaya tranformatsiya v nutrigorodskogo prostranstva [Russian city under capitalism: the social transformation of intra urban space], *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta: Seriya 5 Geografiya*, no. 2 (2012), pp. 26–31.

3 Badyina, A. and Golubchikov, O., 'Gentrification in central Moscow – a market process or a deliberate policy? Money, power and people in housing regeneration in Ostozhenka', *Geografiska Annaler*, vol. 87, no. 2 (2005), pp. 113–129.

Pagonis, T., and Thornley, A., 'Urban Development Projects in Moscow: Market/State Relations in the New Russia' *European Planning Studies*, vol. 8. no. 6 (2000), pp. 751–766.

4 Badyina & Golubchikov, 2005;

Kalyukin, A., Borén, T., and Byerley, A., 'The second generation of post-socialist change: Gorky Park and public space in Moscow' *Urban Geography*, vol. 36, no. 5 (2015), pp. 674–695.

5 Stanilov, K., 'Taking stock of post-socialist urban development: A recapitulation', in Stanilov, K. (ed), *The Post-Socialist City* (Dordrecht 2007), pp. 3–17.

6 Zavisca, J., *Housing The New Russia* (Ithaca 2012).

7 Attwood, L., 'Privatisation of Housing in Post-Soviet Russia: A New Understanding of Home?' *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 64, no. 5 (2012), pp. 903–928.

the public space of the local living environment nurtured the growth of politicised social relationships and place-related agency.[8] This is the foundation for the rise of urban citizenship, which as a particular form of identity refers to a political community that claims rights regarding residential issues of housing, property and other matters.[9] The character of this new collective identity is formed by 'acts of citizenship',[10] which disrupt established and introduce new forms of solidarities. These acts of dissent lead, as the following empirical case studies will show, to new collectives and solidarities in re-politicised neighbourhood spaces.

Mobilisation of local communities has already a history in contemporary Russia and is considered to be amongst the most active spheres of civil society.[11] Since the 1990s, community organisations and neighbourhood initiatives have emerged with the goal of withstanding unwanted constructions and other commercial developments occupying collective spaces in backyards and district parks across Russia.[12] Grassroots initiatives began to spark after the demise of the country-wide fair-election protest wave, which caused a refocus of citizens on local issues in their living environment[13].

The following analysis is based on 20 semi-structured interviews that took place in 2014 with active participants in two grassroots protest mobilisations by local residents. In addition, media coverage of the protest events and information from the initiative groups' homepages and social media pages provided information that has been integrated into the case descriptions. Both protest cases are directed towards unwanted constructions in the participants' living environment, but are situated in distinctive neighbourhoods: Novokosino is an eastern district dating back to the late 1980s, whereas the western Fili-Davydkovo district has been part of Moscow since the 1960s.

Novokosino: From Spontaneous Protest to Community Development

Novokosino is situated on the eastern outskirts of Moscow and is one of the most densely populated districts of the city. Construction started in 1986 on the grounds of a state-owned farm. Novokosino is therefore one of the newer districts of the Russian capital and has been heavily shaped by business-driven construction following the privatisation of the state-owned housing sector in the early 1990s. In January 2013, residents were taken by surprise when heavy machinery began cutting down the trees of a small green area in their yard and digging without any prior notice from the local authorities. Immediately, neighbours who had never met each other before took turns to stand next to the construction site in the freezing cold with homemade posters expressing their dissent or bringing hot beverages and snacks for their fellows. This collective 'lonely picketing' lasted 50 days, gathered at times up to 1,500 people and resulted in the foundation of an informal initiative group with low hierarchies and no official leader under the slogan 'no to the construction' (*netstroike*). This group intended to counteract the local municipality, which had clearly violated legal regulations to hold public hearings before altering the housing environment in order to exclude locals from the decision-making process. After the lonely pickets, the group's next act of citizenship was the collection of 12,000 signatures on a petition to the mayor of Moscow. This violation of their rights sparked the neighbours protest which came to see themselves as victims of despotism and a city government that had been corrupted by the construction business. Lawyers among the neighbours brought up the idea of bringing litigation against the municipality. The protesters' fear of not standing a chance against state and corporate interests was outweighed by their strong conviction that the local authorities had violated their legal and moral right to participate in housing matters. As one of the interviewees stated: 'Whether we have a chance of winning in court is not important. It is a matter of principle. We have to show them that we know our rights and we are not willing to let this go. We need to educate them.' This act of citizenship aimed to directly challenge the existing power relation between residents and the municipality. One of the biggest issues of the initiative was finding opportunities to gather concerned neighbours and spread information or discuss further activities. One way was to organise public demonstrations, for which they needed to get permission from the authorities, and only very few of their requests were granted. Alternatively, they used meeting tactics which subverted the legal restrictions. They organised 'free markets', where people exchange second-hand things at no cost, but used this neighbourhood event as a public space to meet and discuss the protest issue. Likewise, the initiative group invited local deputies from the municipal or city council into the district for a so called 'public walk'. This tactic availed the deputies the right to meet publicly with their constituency without getting prior

8 Jacobsson, K., 'Introduction: The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe', in Jacobsson, K. (ed.), *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (Farnham 2015), pp. 1–32.

9 Holston, J., 'Contesting privilege with right: The transformation of differentiated citizenship in Brazil', *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3–4, 2011, pp. 335–352.

10 Isin, E.F., 'Theorizing acts of citizenship', in Isin, E. F., and Nielsen, G. M. (ed.), *Acts of Citizenship*, (London 2008), pp. 15–43.

11 Kleman, K., Miriasova, O., & Deminov, A., *Ot obyvatelei k aktivistam. Zarazhdaiushchiesia sotsial'nye dvizhenia v sovremennoi Rossii* [From laymen to activists: rising social movements in contemporary Russia] (Moskow: Tri Kvadrata, 2010).

12 Shomina, E., 'Samoorganizatsia zhitelei na lokal'nom urovne' ['Self-management of residents at the local level'], in L. Iakobson (ed.), *Faktory razvitiia grazhdanskogo obshchesta i mekhanizmy ego vzaimodveistviia s gosudarstvom* (Moskow, Vershina, 2008), pp. 63–289.

Rublev, D., Opyt Grazhdanskoi Samoorganizatsii: Dvizhenie Protiv Uplotnitel'noi Zastroiki v Moskve, 2007–2008 [Experience of civil self-managment: the movement against dense construction in Moscow], Rossia i Sovremennyi Mir, 2 (2014), pp. 238–248.

13 Yerpyleva C. V., and Magun A. V., Politika apolitichnikh: Grazhdanskie dvizheniia v Rossii 2011–2013 [Politics of the Apolitical: Social Movements in Russia 2011–2013] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obezrenie, 2014).

permission, and gave the neighbours the chance to meet with each other as well and communicate about their common grievance. Nevertheless, a relation to the mainstream political sphere was mainly rejected by the activists, who took care not to become appropriated by party actors. Instead, they began to turn to other problems of their district beyond the protest issue. A youtube channel about recent events or problems, social media sites, volunteering for cleaning, tree planting or repairs took over as main activities. This established more sustained encounters of residents and started a process of developing a local neighbourhood community in terms of identity-based collective action for the benefit of the district.

Fili-Davydkovo: Sustaining Dissent

Situated in Moscow's west, Fili-Davydkovo is the result of the suburbanisation of two villages in the 1960s. Soviet-area five-story houses dominate the district and the social composition of the population is relatively mixed in age and socioeconomic status, although elevated in comparison to Novokosino given the higher prestige and housing value due to a well-developed infrastructure and a lot of green zones. Although residents were aware that the city administration planned to build a commercial relief road through the area in order to tackle the huge traffic problem, it came as a shocking surprise when in September 2012 a resident by accident discovered a well-hidden public hearing announcement about a certain change in the plan, which put the new road directly 'under our windows'. The immediate mobilisation throughout the neighbourhood brought so many residents to the public hearing that it had to be closed by police force. In the following days, an informal initiative groups was set up under the slogan 'No to the Relief Road' (dubleru.net) that recruited participants from particular streets and housing blocks in order to build up a support-network covering the district. By including architects and lawyers into their ranks, they challenged the public hearing violations by the municipality, but also worked out alternative blueprints for the road construction.
Similar to the Novokosino, the municipals attempt to close off local residents from the decision-making fueled collectively-shared grievances. But the residents had no 'protest site' to go to and meet, because the relief road was planned. Instead, they engaged more in communication and negotiation with the municipal and city authorities. Moreover, they invested their resources in building up a network of information dissemination and mobilisation whenever they needed volunteers and participants. Especially effective was the network of informal street and housing representatives. It was always important for the activists to abide by the law, for example, not violating regulations during the few protests they got permission for, in order to hold the moral high ground vis-à-vis the lawless authorities.
As in Novokosino, activists were careful not to put forward political demands or to be co-opted by a political party. Still, the group approached city councilors to act as bridges between them and the authorities. But as city hall's repellent position remained unchanged, the initiative in Fili-Davydkovo and its supporters' network put forward the original initiator of the protest as a candidate in the city council elections in 2014. Although his candidacy was unsuccessful, the pre-election publicity enabled the issue of the denial and prevention of citizen participation in local decision-making to be disseminated beyond district borders. The conflict spread to two neighbouring districts which were also affected by the planned relief highway but had not yet self-organised and subsequently joined the original initiative's network. Consequently, the encounter of neighbours of different districts multiplied and collective solidarity spread throughout a considerable part of the city's west.

Conclusion

The above-presented cases of two neighbourhood initiative groups and their opposition to state-supported intrusion into public space near homes via unwanted construction projects reveals the lack of legitimacy of such authoritarian models of urban governance in post-Soviet Moscow. A rights-based perception of injustice with regard to the housing environment has sparked grassroots protest in a similar way. The initial act of citizenship,[14] which challenges the established order of power within the authoritarian urban regime in Moscow during spontaneous protest – be it by lonely picketing or by demanding entrance to a closed public hearing – is followed by a process of sustained place-related agency[15] in the form of community development. Those new communities implement new forms of solidarity beyond the initial protest issue and district borders.

14 Isin, 2008.

15 Jacobsson, 2015.

Interview
CHELYABINSK

Lev Vladov
is an urbanist, a public figure and the founder of the 'Chelyabinskii Urbanist' community: a group of activists involved in urban projects and education in the field of urban issues. This community brings together architects, experts of transport development, lawyers and researchers with a common goal: to make a city that provides equal opportunities for a comfortable life for all citizens.

Interviewer: Elena Stein

As researchers, we perceive the city as a complex process in which different actors are involved. So, my first question is, why did you decide to actively join the process of forming the city?

Well, because I stopped liking what my town looked like and how it was administrated. Moreover, I started noticing the wrong decisions of our administration, and I started to write about it. I mean, I know how to do it well. Accordingly, I realised that I have to affect it, because I like the place where I live, and I have no other choice.

What was the most important motive for your activity or a pivotal point?

Disgust for the ruination. My understanding is that I cannot be happy if I do not change my visual environment, i.e. the city. No matter how rich I am, I cannot change anything. If I hadn't been doing this, no matter what my personal successes were, I wouldn't have been able to influence the world, the city around me. And that's why, at some point, I guess I didn't have any other way to start dealing with the problems I was worried about. I guess I started to worry about a lot of problems, and I must have gotten into that stream. I started to write, I saw the response of people who started to be acquainted with my work, and it caught me.

Can you be a little more specific about this moment, how did you feel the need to get involved in this process of forming the urban space or contributing to the city?

Recently, I rented an apartment in a new neighbourhood, in the centre of the city more or less. Once in spring I took a walk, and I realised that everything was terrible. Everything is terrible around me. Then I walked around with my camera, took pictures and wrote a huge article in a 'live' magazine, like bloggers who explore cities and describe their problems. That was before I even thought about what I want to do, before 'Chelyabinskii urbanist'. I wrote this first article. And there has been some kind of feedback. Then I started to write, and I could not stop. I received more and more profound questions and accordingly the feedback of my readers gave me new thoughts and reasons.

Are there any special urban areas or areas where your activity is most visible and effective?

I am very concerned about the historical centre of our city, because only these structures were built even before the war. These structures and the street appearance, of course, which must be rescued and developed as much as possible, because it can made very, very comfortable for living. It has a huge potential, which is being destroyed today through the construction of parking lots and the widening of roads. Accordingly, since Chelyabinsk has a great architectural heritage in the centre, and since the centre of Chelyabinsk is in fact the centre, the capital of the southern Ural, it is in fact the face of the entire region. Moreover, I think that if we cannot fix it, there is no way of dealing with the outskirts, quiet locations, because there it is going to be even worse. That's why I believe that the historic centre is the starting point for the changing of the city. In addition, if it is necessary to change something, then from the centre as the heart of distribution, an example of a good accomplishment to improve the whole city that could be infectious. Therefore, there is potential for a place where people can assume that this is the normal way of things. Today there is no place in Chelyabinsk where you can say 'this is a good street'. That is, where the twelve functions described by Jan Gehl should performed, the twelve functions of a good street.

Based on your experience, what approach, tactics and strategies have you found to be the most successful in implementing your ideas, in the process of forming or changing your city?

In fact, all the projects that we have done are already successfully implemented. I can tell you about a project that I am very proud of and that just shows the power of a dream. I walked through the city and saw at the crossroad this ugly rusty box in which the road communications are hidden in front of the Opera and Ballet Theatre, a beautiful building. It was horrible. I thought that could be easy to change if you clean it all up and draw something on it. Firstly, it would not be rusty and, secondly, it would not have nasty ads on it. Because there is some general experience, which shows that vandals bypass art. Therefore, I gathered a small team of people and told them about my idea. Then we made the first box. They painted it. And we liked it so much, and it was such a great response from people to our project that we decided to launch a donation webpage. Therefore, we placed 'we want to paint here. We need money' and the donation was finished as soon as we got the right amount of money. Then we painted the other boxes. We ourselves chose the drawings. For two years now, we have made about 50 of these objects without the involvement of

any administrations or government. It is a popular movement of inhabitants who want to change their town. 'Let's paint and raise some money'. People donate and we do it. I think that this project is going well, and this project is a small business, which passed many crossroads. It also becomes an event, and an object to which people feel directly related. They know that this belongs to them. People feel like it was there always before, and if someone is going to harm this art object by peeling it off they chase them away. And every day people send stories, pictures of boxes, they also take selfies next to the boxes. Recently, I learned that the network of our objects is marked in the information system of 2gis.ru, it is noted on the official map of Chelyabinsk, as an art object. They illustrate kiosks, bus stops and even the art objects, these boxes.

Which things or ideas that you and your team have planned did not work to the extent or form you wanted to do?

Actually, almost everything worked out. There are some projects, which did not work out, because, maybe... One of the projects was a mobile application, which should unite different city services in one place and which will allow officials and citizens to communicate without bureaucracy, without official appeals, and by means of such an easy messenger. I spoke about it in our city council. I presented it but I didn't find any interest. We made some kind of a prototype, but after the presentation I did not find any interest in the eyes of representatives and in the speeches of the officials. They were afraid that they would have more work to do, and were very conservative about it, because everything new is very frightening to them.

It was the same, also related to the project, when I wanted to mobilise some civic activity. I mean, there are people who want to be involved in creating the city. For example, we have a huge problem with illegal stalls. There are a lot of them. Obviously, of course, the city administration knows about it and it is possible that some of them are in charge of it. However, nothing prevents us from complaining about the illegal stalls, the illegal business that should be demolished. I created an online service that allows people to put a picture of an illegal object or even of a stall. With two districts (we have seven) I even made an agreement, that they, with some simple additional burden, will accept this information and check if newly discovered stalls are legal or illegal. If illegal, they start to dismantle it. I failed to find an agreement with the rest of the districts, and the heads of the districts did not want to participate in this project. We found no support at the city level for this project. Therefore, this project stayed on a level where people participated and collected data but could not pass this information to officials. Only two out of seven districts wanted to cooperate.

So we do very simple and cool services that allow us to optimise the work of officials. We are thankful to the large number of our audiences, that we can collect any data from the field quickly enough. Whether illegal parking lots or illegal advertisements, anything, because we represent a large number of active citizens. In fact, all active citizens are our subscribers. Therefore, the problem of failure of some projects is that the authorities are not interested in their implementation.

Judging by your stories, you have cooperated with other stakeholders such as the state administration, municipality, investors, architects, developers. Which of these partners have proved to be the most interesting or productive for you?

In fact, I have not cooperated with any business stakeholders or architects. I mean, what does cooperation with an architect mean? I have people who help me to make some visualisations as content for my blog. Nevertheless, perhaps the most positive and good cooperation was with the officials who helped and allowed us to do something. For example, to conduct some tactical urbanism on some territory. They helped to find agreements with owners of the territory or just did not interfere, which is already a great benefit. Even when we coloured these boxes, there were officials who helped us to find an agreement with Rostelecom, with the State Automobile Inspection, which are the owners of these boxes, to get permission to colour them. The most positive experience is still successfully working with people who make decisions, so officials.

Who's the hardest to cooperate with?

That is a tough question. I have not tested the level of difficulty with all of these groups, so it is very difficult to say who is the most difficult. I don't know. I think that in my cases the work with the officials was sometimes more, sometimes less easy. The hardest thing to do was to cooperate with the road management board, because there are some incomprehensible people there, and the projects we have proposed were very important, because they were related to road safety, related to road deaths. But unfortunately, we haven't implemented any measures. However, it should be assumed, because the Chelyabinsk administration has long been facing personnel changes, and people are waiting for them to be fired.

And with whom would you like to cooperate if there could be such an ideal option?

I think it would be good if we would cooperate directly with the mayor, because our proposed solutions affect the areas of competence of several departments. And they all obey the same mayor. Alternatively, if the mayor is incapacitated, which is, of course, very sad for a city with a population of a million, because there must be a capable and active manager in a town with a million inhabitants, then we need to be advisers to the governor. As a project team we could give good recommendations on urban management, in particular landscaping, design of public spaces, all sorts of areas for urban activities and perhaps zones for urban events. And of course, we would like to be engaged in road safety consulting, because we have a lot of people dying on the roads, it is really a problem. We have many dangerous places in the city, we have very dangerous roads and we understand what can be done to reduce their danger. And it is very upsetting, of course, that we cannot get the support of the authorities, although society understands the problems and supporting us. We have done a lot to promote safe roads, but why there are wide stripes or a lack of speed limits that kill people. People understand that, but we don't see any involvement of officials yet. So far that is…

Thank you.

Interview
IRKUTSK

Sergey Mayarenkov is an entrepreneur and public figure in the Russian city of Irkutsk. He is also a director of the ANO (Autonomous Nonprofit Organisation) 'Irkutskie Kvartali'. In addition, he is a member of the Irkutsk Public Chamber, head of the network community 'People.I' (chelovek.I), chairman of the Federal Office of Struggle Management in Irkutsk, representative of the agency for Strategic Initiatives in Irkutsk Region, and board member of the Siberian Laboratory of Urban Studies.

Interviewer: Elena Stein

How can my experience be interesting? I am so lucky in life; I combine three active roles at the same time. On the one hand, we do a large number of public actions such as city cleaning where twenty thousand people were involved. Façade work, such as painting facades, when we have championships or lectures. There are a lot of community projects. It is a kind of social action practice. Secondly, I am an entrepreneur. I have my own companies, I lead them, I invest in something, and I have invested a lot over many years. In fact, my involvement in business is one of the longest here. I have been in business since I was a kid. Thirdly, it happens that in projects such as '130 kvartali' and 'Irkutskie Kvartali'... I was an advisor to the Minister of Economy at the time, as they wanted to develop infrastructure for entrepreneurs. I don't really understand these mechanisms of the bureaucratic and official system so well of course, but I have experience in working inside the state system. Moreover, it has turned out that my experience showed me that if you bring the entrepreneurs and the state together and ask them about their positions, they have lively discussions and many differences come to the fore. They have different mentalities. They do not understand each other. Nevertheless, if you are able to understand public institutions, the state and business institutions, you can be just like a translator, connecting all these positions.

You said that the development of the city is a complex process in which different actors are involved. Why did you decide to join this process of forming the city actively?

You know it is some kind of coincidence or a natural situation that happened by itself. I got the chance to work in industrial and business fields, and then I worked with real estate, land plots and construction. And unexpectedly we started with '130 kvartal' project. I participated in one of the sessions as a young entrepreneur, where I was invited to the Baikal session. When the decision was made to implement '130 kvartal' I was invited to participate: 'Come on, you're coming with us to make 130 Kvartal!'. In addition, I was the first employee on this project. I liked it very much. That is how I got into this project.

So, this was your motivation, a reason to stay in the project and move on?

What motivated me was a combination of everything I have done before. It turned out that civil society work, business field and city development converged all in one; a city is the most complex thing invented by humans, in terms of something artificial, man-made complexity.

Are there any special places or areas in Irkutsk, where your activities are most visible?

Of course, you see '130 kvartal'. Essentially, I am not the creator of this project. At first, I started as associate, but there is also something to be proud of, for example, 'Irkutskie kvartali'. We already have something to show for these three years.

Based on your multifaceted experience, what approach, tactics and strategies have you found to be the most successful in the implementation of your ideas and in the formation of your city's space?

I guess the most important thing is the ability to 'feel' the territory at the start and to understand what it is for, its purpose. In fact, we need some kind of hypothesis, a professional advanced concept of territory development. Nevertheless, this concept should not be a way of imputing participants with instructions such as 'Here we are and we are going to do what we've thought up, because we are so smart'. This should be more like a sort of prepared platform or a space where different interests of entrepreneurs can be integrated. We start a dialogue with them, recording their interests, their requests and the contradictions of the city's interests or those of our inhabitants and entrepreneurs. Then the very complex interrelation of the interests of all these groups begins. Then, of course, we certainly look at what is happening in the world. We try to come up with something new on our own; we hold many sessions to develop something interesting, something that did not exist before. For example, when we are working with the existing territory of the city, our approach is to perceive it as a living organism, and the strategies must be adaptive and alive. Programmes must be adaptable to changing situations, both external and internal. From the beginning the concept of 'a common image of the future that everyone wants to make' should be developed. Then it continues to change. Some immutable things are still held in place. I can describe it as 'territory programming'.

Were there moments when there was an idea, but it did not work in the form or to the extent to which you sought? What is the lesson to take out of this?

You know, I think there is a principle here: the joy of failure. It is when you cannot do something, and at the same time, it is a sign that you do not have an adequate understanding of reality. You thought everybody would like it, but nobody liked it. First, I would look out for problems in myself. It means that this project was incorrectly assembled, the interests taken into account were incorrect, the idea was incorrectly presented and, in general, the idea itself may be wrong. Many projects are not really implemented, in my view; that is why we always try to improve our work from these failures.

Please tell us more. You already cooperated with other stakeholders: city municipalities, investors, architects and developers. Which one of these partners proved the most important and interesting for you?

If we take our previous Soviet model, the state decided everything; when it came up with a plan everyone was forced to execute it. This was a kind of administrative model of governance. Today the main sources of development resources, the main sources of means of development, and the main stakeholders are private interests. Moreover, when we change the model from a state to a state-private one, private interests become more powerful. And if the state wants to develop effectively, they need to rely on the right places and make this process convenient for entrepreneurs, investors, in order to form comfortable cities. By the way, entrepreneurs do not invest in places when there is no 'supportive' environment such as infrastructure, networks, roads, parks and squares. In that case, the question is 'who is more important?' The investors can buy an area, but the citizens themselves make it valuable. If the city governance and investors do not know what citizens need, then everyone has lost, and it never paid off, and it will not work. Because everyone has their own role, and projects turn out to be conflicting without taking these interests into account. Entrepreneurs, for example, if they only promote their own interests, they have conflicts with the public and the state. The state, for example, if it promotes its own interests only, you know, red lines are simply drawn. They can put the roads just in the middle of a territory, which belongs to large investors. This can be a beginning of a conflict.

Which actors of this entire urban process among the municipality, investors, architects, activists are the most difficult to cooperate with?

Probably the most difficult subject for me to cooperate with, I call them the 'wrong type of businessmen'. You know, our entrepreneur's culture was in exile for 100 years; we could be imprisoned for entrepreneurial activity in Soviet times. We are now reaping the fruits of this lack of culture in the field of entrepreneurship. When an entrepreneur looks only at the boundaries of his premises and does not care about anything else like, 'I'm the smartest one who bought land in the right place, and everything around me is not my problem'. The facades don't even bother them because they're not inside their area. These entrepreneurs are not able to combine smart and profitable schemes. And it's very difficult to negotiate with them. They want to have a direct benefit here and now. And when you talk to them about long term processes, some complicated scheme, it does not work. That is when the '130 kvartali' paid off, and that is when they start thinking about it. Otherwise, there is even no dialogue.

Another complex moment is when professionals who already have such a folding, a clear-cut picture of the world, and stand firmly on it. And sometimes they stand so firmly that they don't care about flexibility and sanity of everything else that happens around them, because they see only black or white.

Are there any of these people in any of these groups?

Yes. Exactly that kind of people with 'wise' experience are respected. They have this attitude 'I Want' or 'It is mine', some kind of presence, and they start to promote their own idea. You realise that it harms many other interests, and it is hard enough to tie up the idea. Moreover, they are thinking that there are just stupid people around them, and only they know exactly how to do it right. This kind of character is also a complicated one for agreements.

In which projects was it most difficult to implement your ideas and practices?

Do you know which idea has not been realised yet and cannot be made? That is when people create some space and fill it with life... Moreover, when they are not directly involved. From the participation of sociologists to cultural events or activists who try to do something theatrical, some events on the territory of earth. And ending up with people like us, people who, came up from an external position with a concrete concept. Now, you see the benefits for the city, because the budget replenishes, and you see serious economic investments and serious construction is happening. Investors win, builders win, material producers win. They all have a direct benefit. But those who made it work out, and who make the work... for some reason, their interest is ignored, and the mechanisms for them to get a self-staffed income, with those doing this in the current situation, this is a difficult task. Young people will not go into such a profession, do such projects, because no one wants to pay for it. That is the situation we have in this project now and it is not going well yet.

Thank you very much.

Interview
BAKU

Nazaket Azimli
is involved in urban planning and works with a local collective called Pillə, which does experimental urban projects with the physical urban environment and holds a variety of workshops and educational sessions. She is active in the Idea Lab that organised the first Baku urban agenda conference, and was organizing the urban feature event series at the time of the interview.

Interviewer: Tsyplyma Darieva

City development is a complex process involving many participants. Why did you decide to participate in the urban development process of your city? What is your motivation?

So why did I decide to participate in that? The first reason was because I wanted to go into this field in the future professionally. Secondly, I really believed that something has to be done in this field in my own city, which is growing really at a very fast pace. And it's really hard to get work done, there is no citizen participation. We don't even organise ourselves in order to advocate for certain things, because we don't have that practice and no links that connect social activists with policy makers. For that reason, we wanted to start at least with something small, where we can experiment with the city, where we can see what we can do in our own city, and what are the boundaries and how far we can stretch things. It was very interesting. I really liked interacting with people, and hearing their opinions about the city, because since there is no participation you never know what citizens really want for their city. When you go into small neighbourhoods and do projects there, you understand more or less what the situation is. For me it was more about exploring my city, rather than really doing advocacy that is very targeted and will lead definitely to something. Big scale change is not really possible in Baku. It's more about exploring and developing myself in the field – in other words personal reasons – and then there is this social reason as well. When I learned about the *Pillə* group, I decided to join them. In Baku, there is always something being torn down, something constructed in its place. It is like a continuous process and you realise that maybe you could somehow participate in it.

Are there any specific places where your activity is most visible and most effective for change?

I think the most visible place is probably small neighbourhoods and life there. Our activities are not super widespread. And also probably the more intangible things, like the lectures and the various building events, where we are kind of pushed to talk about urban development and involve people in the discussion. I would say that is what is visible: this started becoming a topic among people, at least among people who are socially active and engaged. I wouldn't say that we reached much of a wider audience. But we did organise the Baku Urban Agenda Conference: This was all about starting the discussion and pushing the discourse, rather than really having tangible effects on the urban environment itself.

According to your experience, which tactics, approaches or strategies, have been most successful in the realisation of your ideas?

I would say it was a bit more experimental, like we had this idea, let's say for an art festival. So we went into the neighbourhood, started talking with people, engaging them, inviting them to drink tea with us, but also to share what we have seen in their neighbourhood. People did not believe what we were saying was realistic, because they thought that whatever they rebuild will be destroyed in the future. But then they changed their attitude towards the end, they engaged more themselves in the process, especially the kids, they really helped us. Yeah, that was very interesting. I mean that changed a bit. And I think that the thing we created was that people can go and do something in their own courtyards, and I hear people saying: 'oh they want to do something in their courtyard now, in their neighbourhood now'.

What do you think: why was your tactic, let's call it 'the tea drinking approach', successful?

Because I think we decided to hear the residents and this was something that wasn't done by others in urban transformation projects. Like when the state comes in and decides to transform a park, or like a neighbourhood or something, they don't really talk to the residents or don't ask their opinions. I mean, they just come with a preset design and start implementing it from the very beginning. We at least attempted to involve the residents in the process, listening to what they have to say, and what they see their public space like, and why they don't use it, how would they use it, whether they want to use it, or if are they fine with what they have at their house. So I think that was good.

Could you provide an example in your activity when your strategy did not work well? I mean that was not successful; what difficulties have you faced?

Some of the wooden constructions that we built were broken later, so physically not everything has remained in place. Maybe it was just that they were easy structures to destroy or...maybe just some people didn't still want it, even though we engaged them. There was a kind of event we did to make a common ground for

the networking between people involved in the process of urban development. And we invited both state representatives and activists, and also people, who are not directly involved in urban development, but kind of doing things that relate to it. Afterwards we tried to keep the conversation alive by creating these series of events in Baku Idea Lab… But I don't know, this year I left the country for a while. And... probably this year I won't be back. I am not sure how all will evolve and if we were able to do something that will sustain itself, when the organisers are not there. But there were some interesting events after the urban agenda conference as well. However, it's hard to talk about tangible effects of it: there was no advocacy programme after it; there was no real bridging between the state design institute and the activists. They never invited activists for participation in something. So it's hard to talk about a real impact in that sense.

Did you try to cooperate with other stakeholders? And if so, who are the most important partners in your activities?

I think it would be really good to cooperate with the executive office of the district administration. We have districts (rayons). Each district has an executive office and a municipality. The municipality has much smaller budget and power, than the political power. But we don't have any experience of cooperation with them either. I mean there was one attempt, but they were not really interested in this. The executive office, for example, they have these construction projects … I think one school every year or so. So they are just involved in their own processes. They don't really care about building bridges with grassroots initiatives. They have enough work there, and they are not really interested in involvement. So no, not with the state.

As for NGOs, I mean, there was not a specific project with which we cooperated especially, let's say with the local NGOs. We were just supported by an organisation, I think to organise some artistic projects, where people like urbanites would come and do a research about the city, then organising an exhibition. This is the kind of cooperation that we had. For the urban art festival it was like this as well. We had cooperation with an organisation outside, but no local NGOs. And we are kind of educating and training...organising workshops for the group that is interested in urbanism. We are kind of contributing to their programmes.

Where have your ideas, projects received the most difficulties, in terms of realisation?

First, the problem is, everyone has a full time job or other commitments, and people do it in their free time. When they are really interested in the project, because if you are doing it for free you also have to have some time. So it's really hard in that sense I think. And for that reason… sometimes people say they are not interested anymore. Once their interests switch to something else, they just don't want to be part of it anymore. And you don't have a replacement or an engagement mechanism for new people, because it's not a solid organisation really. It's more of a voluntary based activity, kind of a collective soul. I think in that sense it's a little bit tricky.

Do you think that this has something to do with the specificity of Baku, with its socialist or post-socialist construction?

No, I think actually khrushchyovki[1] and the microrayoni[2] present a really fertile ground for doing projects. There is so much public space, there is so much available space. There is so much engagement among the community, like carpet washing, and other gatherings. You can see that there is so much life in this neighbourhood in comparison to the new skyscrapers, these cubes, where people go into the warehouse and never go out of it; where life is constructed within small cubes. So, I think yes, that's the part which is problematic. I don't see how you can go into a neighbourhood with skyscrapers and try to do some tactical urban projects there. It's just so alienating.

The problem is that there is no maintenance in khrushchyovkis; in microrayoni, they really need some intervention. So it's good when some collectives or groups go there and kind of try to move the neighbourhoods. But the thing is, that most of them are being demolished. Now, there is something completely new of Baku being built. And I think that brings frustration to many people. They think, maybe this city is hopeless, and we maybe concentrate on some other cities, which are not facing this skyscraper boom, so...I think it would be possible to save the khrushchyovki if there was political and economic will. I also wrote an article on that for a British magazine. I really think that they could be retrofitted, they are valuable for preserving community life, in the way they are constructed, and I mean also for preserving the ideals of social housing, which was once there in many cities. Housing became a business.

But when a demolition of a house, or a historical site, or a neighbourhood happens, the citizens do not oppose it. At least the residents of this neighbourhood could stand up for themselves, to get fair compensation or something. But it's not like the whole of Baku, people from different neighbourhoods, will come to a given neighbourhood and try to fight for their rights together, you know? There are obvious reasons for this. It's hard really to organise people and it's not allowed, it's very restricted. So in a larger scale, you can't really influence these processes… It's also about social things, people get moved into the outskirts, and they lose their jobs, access to their jobs, transportation becomes a huge problem. And then, you cannot really participate in that much. […] I think people living on Sovetskiy street, which got demolished, were active in fighting for their rights. But not in terms of participating in urban planning or development. There is no group that is engaged with them, or that helps them. Let's say, they just were recording them, trying to document what was happening, but not participating in the activism part. But maybe in the older parts of Baku where there still are small houses and neighbourhood engagement. Yeah, there is more community engagement there.

1 A khrushchevka is a popular term describing the low-cost panelled housing built during the premiership of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.
2 Microrayon can be translated as microdistrict: a largescale residential complex in the Soviet style.

Interview
BATUMI

Shota Gujabidze is an activist, journalist and film director from Batumi, Georgia. In 2010, he co-founded a non-governmental social platform Batoma aiming at preserving cultural heritage and monitoring city formation in Batumi. Shota is a council member of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency of Adjara. He also cooperates with Tiflis Hamkari, a community guarding cultural heritage and advocating for planned urban development in Tbilisi.

Interviewer: Tsypylma Darieva

The development of the city is a complex process incorporating various agents. Why did you decide to actively join the process of forming the city? What was the main driving force for your activity and what were the objectives of your actions?

I start with a retrospective view. The history of my city and its old architecture has interested me since my childhood. I always was asking questions about why these houses looked so strange, and why they were different from others. Then it turned out that these houses had been built a long time ago, even before the occupation of Batumi by the Bolsheviks.

As for activity, it was a pure spontaneous reaction to the destruction of the old city. So, nobody would have known me as a defender of cultural heritage if this problem hadn't occurred. It didn't start right away, at first I wrote on social networks what was going on in the old city. It started gradually, with interviews, public appearances, social activity etc. It was completely related to the actions of the government. It's hard to call it activism; the real actions were taken much later, starting in 2011. The goal was to make sure that as many people as possible knew what was going on and that there was no need to allow destruction. There is a stereotype in the society that if the government does this, it is the right thing to do. Initially I thought that the first historical house was destroyed by the stupidity of the government; it was the house of Grigol Volski[1] in 2004. This man made the biggest contribution to the history of Batumi city construction. It turned out that it was only the beginning.

'Interfering in the formation of a city' is not an accurate assessment. I try not to interfere, but to prevent this current formation. I try to preserve the most valuable things in this city, the old architecture of Batumi. Of course, new buildings should also be built, but this should not happen at the expense of history.

Even if the struggle ends with our victory, there will be zero condition, i.e., we are for the status quo, not for development, but for protection. This means that our energy, nerves, time and health are wasted on protecting the existing heritage, and not on working out the ideas of correct development of the city. However, this is already theoretically impossible to achieve, because so much has already been destroyed. I think that such a victory does not exist, because it is not a goal or a separate act; the protection of the city is a permanent process.

At what point did you feel that you needed to get involved in the process of the formation of urban space and contribute to the development of the city?

When my friend Nana Kvachadze and I met, we always talked about this problem, that it is impossible to live and endure, and that we have to do something. Everybody in our circle of friends tried not to be together, otherwise everyone would have to listen to our conversation. Nana was the only one among my friends who understood correctly what was threatening Batumi. We felt it, and everyone else was very weak in front of big money and strong power.

1 Grigol Volski (1860, Kutaisi – 1909, Tbilisi, buried in Batumi) was a Georgian publicist, poet, physician and statesman. His Polish family was forced by the Russian government to emigrate to Georgia. Volski was raised and educated in Batumi.

But gradually we met some people who possessed appropriate knowledge and principles, and we gathered for the first time on 3 May 2011 and developed a general plan of action for the protection of Batumi's cultural heritage.

I consider this day the date of foundation of Batoma, our organisation.

Are there any specific urban spaces or city areas which most vividly and efficiently demonstrate the traces of your activity? Could you please provide an example. Thank you.

Yes, and this is the historical part of Batumi, which is very small and walkable in a few minutes. It is about 1 of 100 of the whole city. That means, we are trying to save a small part of the city, but it is this part that is being destroyed, because it is profitable. Here we are dealing with some pathology: Investors are willing to start building because they are attracted to the place. However, after the construction process is finished, many of the investors are not satisfied with the result.

The older and more valuable architecture of Batumi is closer to the sea. The existence of the sea was the major factor why Batumi was founded. This place is the most painful for me and I am more worried about its destruction and the construction of new skyscrapers.

In your experience, what tactics and strategies have you found to be the most successful in implementing your ideas for co-forming the space of your city? At what point did you realise that your idea did not work as well as you expected? Based on this experience, what advice would you give to activists for the future?

I almost never think that my struggle will end successfully. On the contrary, in most cases I know for sure that I will lose. But I just cannot do otherwise.

The most successful case was when many people participated in protests, such as the rescue of the historic Boulevard, where the authorities were going to build a new Dubai. Correspondingly, the actions that did not take on a large scale were not successful. There was a judicial decision at the level of the council and agency, but it was a separate case or example when the problem had just appeared and it was still possible to stop everything. However, experience has shown that there are no problems that are being solved, all the problems are being renewed and we are starting to fight again. The basic issue is to explain the problem to the people in detail, point out the names of those who bear responsibility for decision-making, instead of simply referring to the government in general. Emotions and lyricism are not appropriate in this fight; efficient organisation is substantial because emotions vanish prior to the problem.

Have you tried to cooperate with other stakeholders (such as municipal authorities, investors, architects, developers and NGOs) that are actively involved in the formation of urban spaces? Which of these partners were the most important and interesting for you?

I have a very complicated relationship with everyone except NGOs. It's not a relationship, it's a very wild disassembly. While participating in hundreds of such showdowns, I partake in such meetings every day. It is very unpleasant and takes a lot of energy. It's about the same situation if you explain to the wolf that you should not eat a lamb. Regardless of the argument that you shouldn't eat the lamb, the wolf will eat it. The results depend more or less on the meetings with the government, and only when they have no other choice.

I have never had a chance to agree with an investor, and the architects are very aggressive.

'We are fighting house-by-house'

Sometimes NGOs also lobby the builders and speak out against us. About a year after our organisation was founded, the government was changed. Some of our members came to power, and now we are taking action against our former members.

Could you point out which agents (such as municipal authorities, investors, architects and activists) are the most difficult to cooperate with, and with whom would you continue your cooperation?

The most difficult thing is the relationship with the investor. More precisely, the 'so-called Investor', because they are not investors, they are ordinary criminals; investments do not mean destruction and death. But we have no claims to them. It is clear that they have bad goals, but they do it in agreement with the government. If we meet, it is only at their invitation. In all cases, the initiator of the destruction of cultural heritage is the government that we choose, and they still have to protect cultural heritage according to the Constitution. Therefore, our main target is always the government.

In which projects was it most difficult for you to implement your ideas and practices? Did this problem occur at some point in time or in a certain place, or were there other reasons?

The most unfortunate was the spring of 2011, when they decided to build a skyscraper (Batumi Tower[2]) on the boulevard. Rallies were held all the time, and a lot of law enforcers were involved against us. There were physical clashes. And I was dragged somewhere by the police just because I took photographs. Then the protesters helped me and I was released. Despite the fact that the protest was large-scale, we did not achieve any result. We can say that our first large-scale protests ended in defeat. The reason for this was that the President himself was in charge of the process and it was not decided at the level of the local municipality. Then President Saakashvili bragged about this skyscraper and mentioned us as enemies of the city.

2 In 2011, the company Railway Property Management LLC was going to erect a 35-storey and 200-metre-high building on Batumi Boulevard. Saakashvili's initial plan to open Batumi Technological University in Batumi Tower in 2012 has never succeeded.

06

Urban Protest Movements in Tbilisi:
Social Movements are Strong, but Big Capital is Stronger

Lela Rekhviashvili, David Sichinava, Esma Berikishvili

In mid-January 2019, Tbilisian urban activists prepared to wear yellow vests in protest. In the words of Nata Peradze, one of the key organisers of the urban environmental group, Guerrilla Gardeners: 'If the hotel construction is renewed in Vake Park, protests will also resume, and it's possible we will witness events similar to the yellow vests revolution in Tbilisi'.[1] Contestation over Vake Park started back in early 2014, when the construction of the Budapest Hotel was announced, triggering the most comprehensive urban mobilisation effort in defence of a recreational space in Tbilisi's recent history. Resonating with the tactics of the wave of the Occupy Movements in cities across the globe, the Vake Park defenders camped in tents for about eight months, hosted dozens of concerts, performances, public gatherings and prevented construction activities through their physical presence before the construction halted due to the court order. Urban activists such as Guerilla Gardeners and the environmental NGO Green Alternative have engaged in a five-year long legal battle with the city government and investors. Finally, in January 2019, the Supreme Court of Georgia ruled that the permit for constructing a hotel in one of the central largest parts of Tbilisi, the Vake Park, could not be annulled and that construction should resume.

Surprisingly, the activists found an unexpected ally: Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze from the ruling party, Georgian Dream. Kaladze, who was elected in 2017, long after Vake Park protests, promised that he would do his best to stop the hotel construction.[2] The mayor met with the representatives of different concerned civic organisations, and afterwards personally negotiated with investors the relocation of the construction to another site. The city government's decision did not leave the activists content. Anano Tsinsabidze, a local urban activist and leader of the Initiative for a Public Space, an organisation instrumental in the Vake Park protests, outlined her concerns in a written analytical contribution. She argued that 'while we celebrate the victory [over Vake Park], we have to be clear that saving one park is not a victory, victory will be making systemic changes in city politics'.[3] Tsintsabadze contended that even if City Hall heard popular discontent in the case of Vake Park, officials preferred to solve the problem behind closed doors instead of engaging with legal, institutional mechanisms. Moreover, the mayor's decision to selectively back the Vake Park case highlights the hypocrisy of Georgia's political system. When it comes to other major urban development projects, the city

1 Kunchulia, K, 'vakis parki: vin chaitsvams "qvitel zhiletebs" tbilisshi?' ['Vake Park: Who Will Wear Yellow Vests in Tbilisi?'], 17 January 2019, Radiotavisupleba. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/ვაკის-პარკი-ვინ-ჩაიცვამს-ყვითელ-ჟილეტებს-თბილისში-/29715904.html> accessed 17 August 2019.

2 Liberali, 'qvelapers gavaketeb, rata vakis parkshi sastumro ar ashendes – kaladze' ['Kaladze: "I Will Do All in My Power to Stop Hotel Construction in Vake Park"'] 18 January 2019, Journal Liberali. <http://liberali.ge/news/view/42550/yvelafers-gavaketeb-rata-vakis-parkshi-sastumro-ar-ashendes--kaladze> accessed 17 August 2019.

3 Tsintsabidze, A., 'A Human Victory at Vake Park', 8 Febuary 2019, Open Society – Georgia Foundation <https://osgf.ge/voice/vakis-parkis-kacuri-gamarjveba/> accessed 17 August 2019.

government disregards civic mobilisation and discontent, effectively siding with big capital.

In this essay, we build on and elaborate Tsintsabidze's analyses. We suggest that while Georgian urban movements came to gain substantial mobilisation power, at points influencing urban planning and governance-related decisions, these movements are always a few steps behind large capital in their capacity to shape urban politics. We kick off our discussion with a brief description of the context of the broader politico-economic shifts in Georgia. Through this lens, we analyse how urban movements came into existence in Tbilisi and gained substantial experience and voice while remaining largely excluded from urban planning and governance. The article is informed by the ongoing research of the three authors on different social movements throughout past five years which were published in both Georgian and English language edited volumes.[4] Empirically, we rely on our previously collected research material, on ongoing close observation of political developments in Tbilisi and on recent media articles.

Political Turmoil During the Adoption of a Market Economy

To understand the context in which urban movements grew in independent Georgia, two important aspects of political-economic changes during the adoption of a market economy should be outlined. Firstly, much like many other former socialist states, since gaining independence in early 1990s, Georgian society has faced severe economic collapse followed by social insecurity and the impoverishment of a significant proportion of the population. The early independence years were also marred with two ethnic conflicts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and one civil war, as well as a long-lasting contestation over political power. The history of adopting market economy can be broken down into three phases. The post-collapse years in the 1990s were associated with the slow stabilisation of the political environment, although state institutions were weak and corruption was all-encompassing. The nation-wide deterioration of the socio-economic situation resulted in an everyday struggle for survival. While market institutions were slowly introduced, the process left room for differentiation between the 'winners' and the 'losers' of transition. The second phase of adopting the market economy was kickstarted after the Rose Revolution of 2003. This period saw radical market reforms, as

4 Berikishvili, E., and da Sichinava, D. 'tbilisis sakalako protestis transpormatsia: spontanuri aktivizmidan sotsialur modzraobamde' [Transformation of Urban Protest in Tbilisi: From Spontaneous Activism towards Social Movement], in Sichinava, Chigholashvili, and Zazanashvili, Berikishvili (eds), *kalaki chvenia! urbanuli protesti da politika tbilisshi* [*The City is Ours! Urban Protest and Politics in Tbilisi*] (Tbilisi: Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2016), pp. 29–50.

Activists' backgrounds and motivations

This work is based on the Anthology of Urban Protest project undertaken by the Heinrich Böll Foundation Southern Caucasian Regional Office. For this study we analysed nine different protest initiative case studies. We interviewed activists affiliated with Tiflis Hamkari, Safe Zone, Green Fist, Guerilla Gardening and Green Alternative, as well as the non-aligned Gudiashvili Square rally organisers. In all, we conducted fourteen unstructured interviews. Moreover, we base our findings on the private experiences of the authors gained through participant or nonparticipant observation on protest rallies or our direct involvement as ordinary citizens.

While looking at the demography of the activists we found out that the age groups of people who participate in the protests differs greatly. In particular, their age varies from 20 up to 60, they are usually university graduates, engaged in intellectual work often associated with preservation of cultural heritage, urban studies, architecture and geography, serving as one of the motivators for their involvement in activism. As for the geography of the participants – most of them live in the central parts of the city. In a way, we are dealing with relatively privileged social groups who can invest their time and often funds into the protests.

The motives of the activists are diverse; however, in most cases it is the professional interest in urban development issues that drove our respondents. For them involvement in protest actions became a way for 'professional realisation', with the site of protest serving as the 'space of realisation'. Being aware that city development is going in the wrong direction became a significant stimulus to join the protests. Another sufficient reason is the unsatisfactory living environment, and activists often referred to the lack of being involved in city development processes and the need to claim the city as theirs being the factor for their involvement in protests. Often, personal motives make up another reason why people grew socially active. Some of our respondents noted that their friends' involvement had been a great influence. At some point during the research it became evident that it would be quite complicated to seek informants of diverse social affiliations, which also speaks to the peculiarity of the protest movements in question.

Jens Liebchen, Gudiashvili Square reconstruction site, March 2019
Photo: Jens Liebchen, March 2019.

Panorama Tbilisi project
Photo: Esma Berikishvili, August 24, 2019.

well as the strengthening of state institutions, including state repressive and coercive power, and deepening socio-economic inequalities. Finally, since the peaceful electoral power change in 2012, Georgian politics has been marked by the continuation of market-reliant reforms, albeit with slightly more of a social cohesion component and significantly reduced overt state violence and repression.[5]

The implication of these three phases for urban movements is that the substantive mobilisation energy of Georgian society was, for a significant period of time, directed at broader democratisation efforts, revolutionary protests and violent and lately also peaceful changes in political power. Hence, the emergence of specifically urban social movements, understood as those 'social movements through which citizens attempt to achieve some control over their urban environment (the urban environment comprises the built environment, the social fabric of the city, and the local political processes)',[6] only gained momentum by the mid to late 2000s. Importantly, the peaceful change of power in 2012 was perceived by various social movements, including urban movements, as a substantial widening of political opportunities, marking diversification and increasingly vocal mobilisation of urban movements.

Secondly, a significant contextual aspect behind the rise of urban movements in Tbilisi is the uniquely aggressive and extensive neoliberal transformation of the city since the Rose Revolution of 2003.[7] The new government of 2003 inherited from their incumbents a systemic disregard for urban planning, and a diversity of extralegal urban development, be it waged by individual urban dwellers (garages, building extensions, and land appropriation) or larger-scale construction projects executed by intertwined business and political elites. While the post-revolution government managed to consolidate state administrative capacity and gained more power in shaping urban development, they ignored the pressing need for reintroducing transparent, socially and environmentally sensible urban planning and actively engaged in disposing urban space to privatisation on the one hand, and state-led large construction and developmental projects on the other. Hence, two aspects of post-revolution urban politics – top-down, unaccountable and erratic decision-making and an unprecedented scale of private construction in previously green or public spaces – prompted urban dwellers to start mobilising in defence of urban heritage, cultural and historical identity and environment. In addition to these topics, in recent years increasing motorisation rates enabled by car infrastructure development, lack of parking regulation and insufficient public transport provision, placed pollution and traffic regulation on the agenda of urban movements.

5 Baumann, E. 'Post-Soviet Georgia: The Rocky Path towards Modern Social Protection', 10 September 2010, European Social Policy Analysis ESPANET. <http://horizon.documentation.ird.fr/exl-doc/pleins_textes/divers12-06/010053217.pdf> accessed 17 August 2019

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6 Pruijt, H. 'Urban Movements', in Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 1. <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/b.9781405124331.2007.>

7 Salukvadze, J. 'Market Versus Planning? Mechanisms of Spatial Change in Post-Soviet Tbilisi', in Assche, Salukvadze, and Shavishvili (eds), *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi: Where Europe and Asia Meet* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), pp. 159–185; Salukvadze, J., and Golubchikov, O., 'City as a Geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia – A Globalizing Metropolis in a Turbulent Region', *Cities*, vol. 52 (2016), pp. 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.11.013>.

A Brief History of Urban Movements

Tbilisi's contemporary urban activism is nurtured from the socio-political complexities of transition to capitalism, although the role of protest traditions should not be denied. One key source of urban activism stems from the late 1980s when the shattered Soviet system started tolerating protests. In this period, heritage activists protested Soviet military drills at the Davit Gareja military training area, and environmental activists resisted the construction of the Transcaucasian Railway. Indeed, all these initiatives were mostly nationalistic in character, although they also highlighted the fact that environmentalist and heritage preservation issues were salient political questions for Georgians. These types of protests were soon swallowed up and overtaken by political rallies. During the last three decades of Georgia's political history, the country's capital was the epicentre of protests for the country's independence, demonstrations against incumbent presidents and governments and revolutions. These rallies featured a dramaturgy of despair and radicalism. Protests were often choreographed by the political parties which by playing the existing dissent against political class in the country's society tried to achieve specific political goals.

Starting from 2007, issues of urban development became salient for a selected group of activists. Their newly incepted activism was an outcry against the overt neoliberalisation of urban planning practices, especially in the field of heritage preservation. As the rules of preservation were manipulated to accommodate investors, several buildings lost heritage status and were privatised. These facts ignited various protests between 2007 and 2010. Rallies against demolitions of a historic building on Leonidze street and the Institute of Marxism and Leninism building on Rustaveli street were the first and the most vocal of its kind. Tbilisi's newly emerged urban movements came to a head in 2011 when a group of activists staged a permanent protest against the rebuilding of Gudiashvili Square in the historic district of Tbilisi. The Gudiashvili protests brought

shifts to both the dramaturgy and programming of Tbilisi's urban movements. Theatrical performances and a festive atmosphere at rallies attracted even those who previously were reluctant to participate in any protest rally. The carnivalesque undertone of urban protests were later adopted by other groups as well.

The change of Georgia's political leadership in 2012 did not necessarily bring dramatic shifts in politics or economic approaches. Continued neoliberal policies meant that the issues which kept urban activists mobilised were still relevant, even, in some cases, more acute. For instance, Guerilla Gardening, which emerged as the vanguard of urban activism, engaged in struggles for preserving Tbilisi's green areas which faced encroachment from a growing number of developers. The Vake Park protests described in this piece were also part of this struggle at an earlier stage. Tbilisi's scattered urban movement scene came together against a multi-billion Panorama Tbilisi project. The Panorama Tbilisi protests showed the potential of unity and simultaneously exposed the weaknesses of urban activism in Georgia. The Panorama Tbilisi project was initiated by former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, who also happens to be the wealthiest man in Georgia. The project, which envisages constructing large office and hotel buildings in the very centre of the town, was met with fierce opposition from urban movements. The Panorama Tbilisi protests brought together all urban activist groups in Tbilisi under the umbrella of the Together movement. The movement staged several protest rallies against the construction of Panorama Tbilisi Project and against Ivanishvili but without success. While urban protest rallies had been successful in countering isolated incidents of urban encroachment, they failed to counter a multi-billion project backed by the most powerful man in the country.

Gudiashvili protests 8 February 2012
Photo: Tsira Elisashvili

Experienced but Still Powerless Against Big Capital

It is undeniable that over the past decade Tbilisian urban movements have consolidated a substantial mobilisation power, collected the experience of deploying diverse repertories – from street protest and physical occupation of spaces to media visibility and court case filing– and hence carved out a political opportunity space for having their voices heard, at points influencing urban planning and governance-related decisions. Beyond the victory with the Vake Park case, other developments in Tbilisi urban politics also reflect direct and indirect influence of urban movements' efforts. Among those, raising levels of public awareness concerning issues of urban environment and broadened social base and spatial spread of urban movements are key. In addition, the recent Mayoral elections resonated with popular concerns, and the current Mayor Kakhi Kaladze emphasised urban environmental issues in his electoral campaign. Despite his initial stiffness, the mayor also had to submit to the demands of Tbilisi metro drivers, increasing their salaries as of January 2019. Beyond solving some contentions behind closed doors, the mayor and his political team are indeed changing formal regulatory frameworks primarily to constrain the wild construction sector.[8] In a similar vein, the city invests increasingly in upgrading the public transport fleet with low-emission vehicles, targeting the phasing-out of older buses from Tbilisi's streets. On the national level, the state is slowly but steadily reintroducing emission controls and vehicular technical check-ups, in an attempt to address environmental concerns.

At those points where the state activates the coercive and repressive apparatus, social mobilisation in response is prompt and vocal and usually not marked by further repression. Protests in May 2017 against a police raid on the Bassiani Club are illustrative. Thousands of young people gathered in defence of urban cultural spaces against police violence in May, staging so called 'dancing' or 'techno' protests, behind the slogan 'we dance together we fight together'. The success of these protests and associated movements is debated, but seen in a historical perspective, especially

8 1TV, 'koepitsientebis mateba da ka-2 koepitsientebis gaqidva aghikveteba – kaladze' ['Kaladze: "Increases and purchases will be prevented"'], 15 February 2019. <https://1tv.ge/news/kakha-kaladze-koeficientebis-mateba-da-ka-2-koeficientebis-gayidva-aghikveteba/?fbclid=IwAR2n03UgncAOrRP8UMKPoWML2VqVMhU8qb7f0UKki_hXm_e2KsWSBdvCLb0> accessed 17 August 2019.

Protesting Panorama Tbilisi project
31, January, 2015
Ivane Goliadze

comparing in the post-Rose Revolution context, the very fact that quick and wide-based mobilisation is possible, and that the state refrains from further repression is already an important development. In summary, at this point urban movements are capable of waging and, to a degree, of winning some conflicts without facing too severe consequences in terms of a repressive backlash.

It is also undeniable that the key obstacle to strengthening urban movements in Tbilisi is big capital, which is enmeshed with the state apparatus and beyond the reach of any popular accountability. The Panorama project, the largest urban development project that Tbilisi has witnessed since independence, recently labelled as 'a monster in town' or 'a pharaonic real estate project', is illustrative of the limits of urban mobilisation.[9] Despite the unprecedented mobilisation against the Panorama project and the unique merging of numerous urban movements, the project's execution has not been hampered. Behind it is the Georgian Billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, a man who contributed to the toppling of the post-revolution government, now ex-prime minister and leader of the ruling party. Despite distancing himself from the government, he is widely seen as the shadow, de facto ruler of Georgia. In principle, under his shadow rule, urban as well as national governments increasingly bend to accommodate popular discontent, keeping aggressive and violent coercion to the minimum. However, his private development projects go unhampered, draw on state resources and consistently ignore dissenting voices.

The limits of Tbilisian urban movements then are once more entangled with broader democratisation challenges. It is certainly unclear if power shifts should be expected any time soon. The government currently retains loyalty to the strong man, while smoothing out popular discontent by permitting small scale victories for urban movements. But it is clear that urban mobilisers will continue to face one – the major – limit: the untouchability of the largest capitalist in the country. As long as public accountability mechanisms are not restored, this situation will not change. Obviously, beyond that limit, urban mobilisers seem to have the space to push against the city authorities and continue trying to re-negotiate their urban spaces. Their overtime persistence and activation of gained experience seems ever more important, as the number of contested development projects and corporate assaults on public space are still only increasing over time.

9 Lorusso, M, 'The Panorama Tbilisi Project: A Monster in Town', 4 April 2018, OBC Transeuropa. <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Georgia/The-Panorama-Tbilisi-project-a-monster-in-town-186839> accessed 17 August 20.

07

The Third Space of Urban Pioneers on Russia's Arctic Periphery

Alexander Formozov

At night, amid the snowy landscape of a small Russian industrial town, people arrive at an austere two-story brick building, some of them carrying well insulated musical instruments. It is the night before a national holiday, the 'Day of the Fatherland's Protectors', formerly known as 'Red Army Day'. This Friday evening temperatures are around -10 °C and the sun sets at 5:37 p.m. The days are getting longer now, whereas the first day of the year lasted just around 18 minutes in Kovdor, way beyond the Polar Circle. At the concert on 22 February 2019, which was dedicated to 'Kurt Cobain's Birthday', guests were invited to wear stripes and ripped jeans and musicians asked to have at least one Nirvana song in their repertoire. The concert venue, which was established just two years ago, is run by local activists as an open platform for cultural and social activities. Considering the efforts needed alone to register an association, this is quite a unique establishment for a place like Kovdor – a single-industry mining town located in the scarcely populated Russian Arctic region along the border with Finland.

Russian society has recently witnessed a growth in social mobilisation and activism. This growth is not limited to the more visible political and protest activism in the larger cities but also includes local initiatives throughout the country, many of which focus on the enhancement of their nearby environment. The latter develop increasingly on the margins of Russia – also in small and middle-sized towns, in industrial cities and single-industry towns like in North-Western Russia on the Kola peninsula. Here, however, the position of local youth and activists differs in many aspects. In this region, active young people often express the need to overcome isolation and social fragmentation. Due to the lack of a public sphere, communication and sheer population, individuals often feel disconnected. Local activist groups remain small and vulnerable.[1]

From 'Monotowns' to Shrinking Cities

Russia's periphery was mostly urbanised in the late Soviet period. To secure the extraction of natural resources and industrial production, urban centres emerged in isolated areas of the USSR according to the requirements of central political and military planning. In the Russian Arctic today 2.1 out of 2.4 million inhabitants live in urban areas, with 800,000 in the Murmansk region alone. Most of the towns, built since the late

1 The data for this article was gathered by the author in 2016–2018 during several projects with CISR e.V. (Berlin), which focused on non-formal education, networks and international exchange in urban activism and were supported by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany. An important regional focus of those projects was on North-Western Russia, particularly on shrinking and industrial towns on Kola Peninsula. The projects were implemented and initiated in close cooperation with colleagues from St. Petersburg, who contributed with their in-depth research experience and whom I must thank: Alla Bolotova, Elvira Gizatullina, Oleg Pachenkov, Irina Shirobokova and Lillia Voronkova.

1930s–1950s, are single-industry towns,[2] so-called 'monotowns' (*monogoroda*) with specific features and challenges. They have been shaped by the primary role of industrial production, which is reflected not only in their construction, but also their economy, demography and institutions. Once powerful city-forming industries used to equate their citizens with employees and provided them with all kinds of public services, living space and leisure, mainly in order to motivate qualified specialists to relocate there despite the harsh living conditions. After the demise of the Soviet system, the situation changed but the everyday life of citizens, their expectations and identity are still imprinted by this ideology of paternalism. At the same time, the worldview and mind-map of the younger generation of locals differs a lot from the older ones.

Typical problems of post-Soviet transformation, including rapid socio-economic decline and deindustrialisation in the 1990s, were often dramatic and frustrating in monotowns. A decrease in production and the deterioration of infrastructure left these cities with little comfort and security, thus fuelling the emigration of the young, active and well-educated. Among school graduates over 90 percent expressed the wish to leave their hometowns, mostly for educational purposes.[3] One-sidedness, a feature of the monofunctional character of these cities, is visible in many areas, for example in the imbalances of labour markets, the demographic and gender structures of population as well as the insufficient supply in education, public services etc. Local administrations are often weak due to the general over-centralisation of power and business structures. Since local financial resources are small and dependant on transfers from Moscow, public spending and services are often insufficient. Local administrations tend to compensate by privatising or renting out all available municipal properties for commerce. Another big drawback for urban youth is that these towns offer only a limited repertoire of cultural and social opportunities. Local young people are often in need of spaces where they can meet peers and be creative. This is an issue of both physical places and social sphere, as there is an absence of networks which could help overcome isolation and dysfunctional social lifts. Thus, a social space and the concert venue mentioned above requires serious efforts to organise. At the same time, it offers an important and needed social platform for youth to socialise.

2 A 'monofunctional town' is defined in Russian legislation as a town with a minimum of 3,000 citizens, where at least 20 percent of workforce are employed in the same 'city-forming enterprise' or sector of feedstock industry. Over 400 so called 'monotowns' once produced a remarkable 40 percent of the late Soviet GDP. Now the official number dropped to 319, inhabited by 15.6 million people who produce around ¼ of the Russian GDP. See the definition by the Russian Government <government.ru/docs/14049/> and amended list of monofunctional towns (latest edit in 2019) <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/420210942>, accessed 14 April 2019.

3 Unpublished survey by the European University St. Petersburg conducted among local youth.

A Portrait of the Kovdor Activists

Prityazhenie (meaning, 'gravitation') is a youth centre established in Kovdor by two local young men and a young woman during the educational programme offered by CISR with Russian partners in 2016. During the workshops they developed the first idea of a social youth centre. After the centre started operating, Maxim and Andrey drafted the statute and registered the association in Murmansk – this process took more than a year and faced a series of drawbacks. Maxim (born 1981) is a Kovdor refinery worker and freelance photographer. He experienced the decline and insecurity of life in the mining town as a youngster in the 1990s. At that time, he became interested in rock music and started playing the guitar and singing in a band. Though he did not understand English texts at first, later he learned some English by translating the song texts of his favourite musician Kurt Cobain. Once he described the rough subculture and mood of his youth, saying that young men were separated into two opposing fractions: the 'bold-ones' and the 'hairy-ones'. When we first encountered Maxim, he seemed reserved, and as he admitted later, he indeed had some mistrust towards unknown people offering a fully funded educational programme for urban activists. (Not only) his first thoughts were of a dubious hidden agenda.

Andrey (born 1994) also belongs to the generation of transition, although he had not experienced the so called 'turbulent' 1990s in the same way as Maxim. After army service in the same region in his early twenties Andrey started working for a leading supplier of mining machinery, whose office and stock of materials are integrated in the Kovdor refinery. He is active on social media and administrated several Kovdor SM-groups, such as 'Mutual Help on the Roads', a local group for car-sharing 'fellow travellers' and a news group. The third initiator, Olesya, a trained philologist who temporarily worked for the refinery, resettled to the city of Petrozavodsk at the initial stage of the project, thus demonstrating the main challenge to monofunctional towns and to Kola peninsula in particular by her own example. Having higher humanitarian education, she could easily find a job in a city, which also offers a richer cultural life. On the contrary, in her hometown, the relatively well-paid jobs in the mining sector are limited especially for female workers, and the shrinking public sector is incompatible with the private sector. This disbalance leads to

Left:
Today the population of Kovdor is nearly 50% smaller than in 1990. The local pit mine and refinery employ about 3,700 people out of 16,000. The town, which was founded in 1953 for the extraction of iron ore and phosphates, is located near the border with Finland, approximately 100 km to the north from the Polar Circle.
Photo: Maxim Mugatin

Right:
Visible symbols of the past are typical for mono-industrial towns today and they are contrasted by a lack of a vision of the future.
Photo: Maxim Mugatin.

high rates of female emigration and a respective demographic gender gap. In 2016, Maxim explained the necessity of having a social centre: '[In Kovdor] there are many musicians, people who do different [creative] things, but they are all isolated'. As a positive example the Apatity social centre was mentioned, offering concerts, debates, talks, trainings etc. By contrast, Kovdor lacked such spaces for recreation and educational activities for children and youth. Especially young people after school age were not involved in any 'cultural leisure' activities except sport clubs and had no place to meet. It is very characteristic that the activists' argumentation involved an example from a town located 160 kilometres away. For the youth of the Kola peninsula driving several hundred kilometres to the next town to meet friends is not unusual, be it in Russia, nearby Finland or Norway. In this way the first contact of Kovdor activists with colleagues from Apatity was made. 'The proximity of the borders with Nordic countries and the well-developed connections with them also contribute to the high level of mobility among the young people in the Murmansk region'.[4] Cross-border exchange with Scandinavia, both economic and cultural, is still at a remarkable level despite a drop in 2014 due to economic difficulties. Finnish and Norwegian regulations allow for local citizens to easily travel to those countries. Even if not in possession of their own car, young people cover long distances using buses, trains, car-sharing and hitchhiking. Many have first-hand experience of foreign countries in Europe and Asia. Because spending the summer months in Southern areas of Russia is seen as necessary for kids, locals get used to travelling from an early age. Most locals are personally connected to other regions of the former USSR as 2nd or 3rd generation visitors, so the mind-maps of local youth often stretch over long distances, and individual life strategies are chosen correspondingly. Sometimes the population of Russian monofunctional towns is described as passive and not adaptable enough.[5] This thesis does not apply to the youth of Kola peninsula. On the contrary, an important feature of the Russian youth in general applies to the local young generation of Kola, too: an entrepreneurial mindset, which helped Kovdor activists to self-organise and to create a new communicative space from scratch.[6]

4 Bolotova, Alla, Karaseva, Anastasia, and Vasilyeva, Valeria, 'Mobility and Sense of Place among Youth in the Russian Arctic', *Sibirica*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2017, pp. 77–123, here p. 88.

5 Kommersant, 'Formula ozhivleniya monogorodov' ['A formula for reviving monotowns'], 20 February 2017. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3224939> accessed 25 August 2019.

6 Krawatzek, Félix and Sasse, Gwendolyn, 'Youth in Russia: Outlook on Life and Political Attitudes', ZOiS: Report No. 1, June 2018. <https://www.zois-berlin.de/publikationen/zois-report/zois-report-12018/> accessed 25 August 2019.

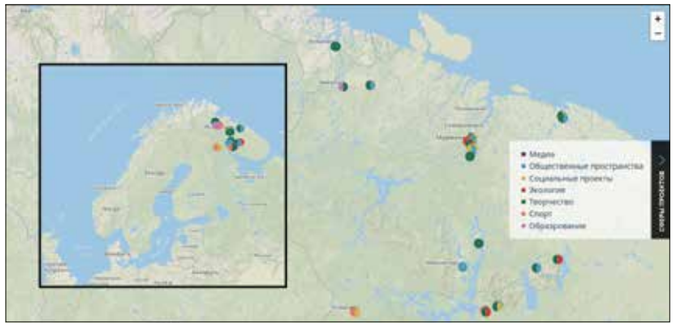
The Force of Kovdor 'Gravitation'

One might think, that a town of 16,000 like Kovdor, which lost about half of its population over recent decades, should offer abundant free space for social or cultural activities in emptied buildings. It seems a paradox that one of the primary challenges in shrinking towns is often the lack of available physical space, which often is either private, in commercial use or just not available. In order to gain access to physical space, Kovdor activists – mostly employees of the local mine and refinery themselves – strived to establish close trans-sectoral ties with local stakeholders, particularly the city-forming enterprise and the local administration. This strategy proved successful. Soon, some available premises in a municipal building were found and refurbished by volunteers. Individuals, small businesses and the mining company donated some materials, second-hand furniture and window blinds, and the city mayor donated a printer.

Prior to Prityazhenie, which was founded in 2017, the city of Kovdor lacked a space for cultural and social activities for young adults. The local 'House of Culture' could not be used for independent creative practices being 'a world in itself' and not quite responsive, as the activists themselves put it. Instead, spaces not intended for such use were creatively appropriated for cultural purposes. One example is individual car garages on the periphery of Kovdor, which serve as rehearsal rooms and pottery workshops. Inspired by these projects, which they encountered on study trips to German industrial towns and St. Petersburg, several local activists decided to change their situation by bringing the isolated creatives of their town together.

From the beginning of the project, its organisers were concerned to overcome mistrust and resignation in order to create a local activist community. Positive communication had to be established with the authorities on the one hand and local population on the other. Initially, the agenda of the centre was inspired partly by a social centre in a neighbouring town of Apatity. Activists also held an online open call to include the community and to source new ideas – and many of these were later implemented successfully. 'When we were choosing a name, we decided to do an online vote to attract people', Maxim recalls. In general, the use of the Russian social network Vkontakte (VK) for communication with interested young people proved very effective.

An interactive map of local initiatives of the Murmansk region, which are active in different areas of life, was created at www.severblizko.ru in 2018.
Photo: Alexander Formozov



Two years on, Prityazhenie now hosts an array of cultural and social activities. For example, there are parlour games, a cinema club, public discussions, Finnish, Saami and English language clubs, T'ai Chi and Yoga, world dance classes, and concerts by local musicians – so called Kvartirnik. All the activities are offered by volunteers free of charge. In addition to that, early activists started organising open-air events in the urban landscape, such as photography days in the public park, featuring games, music, competitions, and an exchange of stock for amateur photographers. The local administration started to pay attention to the activities of the centre and to involve activists and their online and offline networks in various city level events. A recent rock festival organised in the public square on the Day of Youth with the help of Prityazhenie was finally relocated to the House of Culture.

Many of the events are documented on video or broadcasted online. Among the activities most popular were concerts, discussions or talks with invited guests and the above-mentioned outdoor activities. Among the recent guests of Prityazhenie in 2019 was Mr. Stefan Ingvarsson, Sweden's cultural attaché to Russia, together with a writer of Kovdor origin – Ms. Elizaveta Zorina. 'People are very nice here in Kovdor', says Ingvarsson. He is surrounded by around 20 mostly young people who have made themselves comfortable on beanbags: 'Maybe it's because winter is as long as in Sweden and you are used to helping each other. Or maybe it has to do with the mining, because all of you came from different parts of the country and developed new relationships here'.

Activities of the centre include diverse formats of socialising as mentioned above. But it is also possible just to come and talk and have a tea with friends, although drinking alcohol is strictly prohibited. After around one year of activity the organisers asked their fellow activists, what the centre means for them: 'Save haven', 'cosy place', 'a place where I adopted to life in a new country', 'a breath of fresh air', 'second home', 'where one wants to invest oneself in others', 'where every person can be heard', 'where everyone is significant' and 'a warm collective'; or as Andrey put it, they created a 'community where totally different people experience the same emotions'.

'Grassroots' in the Arctic

These grassroot actors, whose contributions to social and cultural change have been described here, can be viewed as pioneers. In what ways do such actors contribute to social change in the Murmansk region? By moving from 'consuming' urban environment and temporary actions, to long-term or repeated local initiatives aimed at public good, they co-create the local living environment. Their contributions include the creation of new meanings, cultural practices and social platforms. Such change actors may include creative scenes, civic and ecological activists, preservationists of cultural heritage, 'pioneers of urban space' in terms of temporary cultural use, even sport clubs, who may act as social and cultural entrepreneurs, volunteers or associations.

There is no general recipe how to become a successful actor of change in the Russian Arctic. But certainly, one important aspect is to master the narrative of local decision-makers. When the young musician and social entrepreneur Nikolay presents his project as a concert and rehearsal platform for *neformalnaya molodezh* ('non-formal youth') he demonstrates that kind of communication. The term is used in the region to signify punks and other alternative cultural scenes.

Activists in the Murmansk Arctic contribute to the development of Murmansk region by highlighting and addressing a variety of local concerns. Platforms for culture, music and creativity were initiated for example by Plavuchiy Dok, 'Roxy' and 'Mister Pink' in Murmansk and by Vtoroy Etazh in Revda. Music and arts summer festivals like Gorod Solnza and Teriberka gathered numerous artists, craftspeople and youth on the

A photography-day in the public park in Kovdor, featuring games for young people, live music, competitions and an exchange stock for amateur photographers.
Photo: Maxim Mugatin

7 See the interview with Ekaterina Sharova (in Russian): <https://www.colta.ru/articles/art/19984-kogo-sprashivayut-o-severe> and the database 'Creative Industries of the North': <http://arcticartinstitute.com/en/creativeindustries/> – a project of the Arctic Art Institute.

8 The map of local social and cultural initiatives where projects can be registered by their authors can be found here: <http://severblizko.ru/>.

shores of the White and Barents Sea. Creative projects such as the '5th Element' studio for hip-hop dancing in Apatity or the 'Arctic Theatre', the first non-state theatre in Murmansk, enrich the cultural sphere. Some experts even suggest that creative industries might eventually become a new driver for development in the Arctic[7] and attempts are underway to network those actors throughout the Northern region.[8] Apart from that, initiatives address a vital problem for the Russian Arctic – ecology – and aim at education and international exchange, sustainable waste management and sustainable tourism. At the same time, ecological organisations like Priroda-i-molodezh in Murmansk need to be very careful with issues which could infringe on some sensitive state interests (e.g. nuclear power, military) and powerful private actors (oil and gas industry). Further initiatives covering the areas of sports, gender and feminism, charity, inclusivity etc. cannot be addressed here in detail.

Graffiti in Zapolyarnyj were created by a competition in 2016.
Photo: Alexander Formozov

Which are the main goals pursued by urban activists' initiatives in the Arctic? Transforming the local living environment, reclaiming places and creating public spaces is a shared aim to many initiatives. Activists make a conscious decision to stay in the region and to develop it, to make 'their' place more comfortable and liveable, and to give others incentives to stay. Places can be reclaimed in a playful and resourceful way, as by the Street Session festival for street-culture and street-art which took place in 2017 in Apatity. Also, amateur-exhibitions and concerts by Prityazheniye in Kovdor were aimed at revitalising public parks. But long-term approaches, as recreating an all-season spot of leisure-culture in a central city park, such as Bereg Razvlecheniy in Monchegorsk, are rare.

As workshops conducted during the educational project have shown, overcoming isolation on local and regional level and reclaiming a voice and a space are among the primary needs of young urban activists in the Northern region. On the regional level activists attempt to overcome this distance; they maintain high levels of interest in their colleagues' projects in the region, follow each other on social networks and eventually meet and visit each other's events. Despite many economic and cultural connections with Scandinavia in the last years, international contacts have been limited for civic actors, due to shrinking space for civil society and the risks connected with latest Russian legislation on NGOs.[9]

Which formal models do activists choose, how do they ensure their projects become sustainable in the long term, and do they? For Prityazhenie the registration of an NGO took numerous attempts in Murmansk (290 km away), significant financial resources and over one year in time. Given such high hurdles and financial risks, many choose more adaptable or hybrid ways of implementation. They either do not institutionalise their activist projects at all, working on a flexible network basis and implementing them as a physical person or individual entrepreneur. Even long-term projects and spaces like the Vtoroy Etazh in Revda can be run for years in such a way. 'The refinery gave us a place, now we are trying to convince them to cover operating expenses', says Mikhail, who never planned to institutionalise his project differently. The apartment they use is registered privately and they would probably leave the region in some years anyway, he adds. Indeed, several examples have also demonstrated that independent NGO projects cannot rely upon the benevolence of local administrations.[10] Some initiatives therefore use different strategies, such as the concert and rehearsal platform Plavuchij Dok, run as a business in a former warehouse in Murmansk. At Bereg Razvlecheniy the initiators rely on multiple strategies, combining non-commercial loans, close ties with the local administration and NGO-grants with a sustainable business strategy. This kind of a hybrid approach may be a useful strategy. On the other hand, some initiatives may choose not to become institutionalised in order to minimise the efforts and risks, or to remain 'below the radar', using closed chats and anonymous channels for communication, thus creating 'invisible' communities which can be very flexible and adaptable.

Conclusion

Current neoliberal economic developments and conservative political trends in Russia sometimes reinforce each other. Budgets for public infrastructure and social policies are being cut. Due to the increased privatisation and shortage of available places, non-commercial use of municipal spaces as public places is shrinking. If in bigger cities there is a lacking of variety of alternative places for creativity and communication, in stagnating towns their scarcity is felt even more sharply. So, the need to reclaim and create spaces for cultural and creative activity and leisure often becomes central for local initiatives on the Russian periphery. Many of those spaces can be understood as 'third places'. According to Oldenburg these are 'a public place on neutral ground where people can gather and interact'.[11] Examples may include social and cultural centres, clubs, parks, cafes etc. Many such projects must find a defensive strategy against commercial pressure as much as against pressure by state authorities. At the same time the emigration of young, well trained and active citizens from the Arctic is broadly recognised as a central challenge to the Northern region.

By bringing into being initiatives which serve the common good and create innovative cases, which may in their turn lead to new social infrastructures and material changes, new networks and cultural practices, urban activists might also spearhead a change in public consciousness and behaviour. The pattern of 'aggressive immobility', described by Samuel Green[12] as the 'purposeful and concerted defence by citizens of a weakly institutionalised state', is being challenged by the proactive behaviour of a new generation of pioneers.

9 The 'Youth Humanist Movement' had to abandon its activities of joint projects with German partners in 2014–2015. As a result, the majority of activists left the region and the organisation was abolished.

10 The 'Roxy' Youth centre in Murmansk lost its contract for a municipally owned space in 2017, just two years after the well-known youth centre 'Mr. Pink' had to close doors.

11 Oldenburg, Ray, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989).

12 Greene, Samuel, 'Running to Stand Still: Aggressive Immobility and the Limits of Power in Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 34, no. 5 (2018), pp. 333–347.

08

Limited Claim of the Right to the City:
The Case of Urban Activism in Baku

Nakazet Azimli

Organised urban activism in Baku is yet to form. To this day any activism's tangible impacts in the field remains sporadic, iffy and difficult to measure. The claims of the 'right to the city' of Baku dwellers, have been discussed only in the framework of people who are originally from Baku-Bakintsy trying to protect their habitus and codes of urban behaviour from transformation as the result of an influx of inner migration (Krebs, 2015). In trying to analyse if dwellers of Baku are able to claim their 'right to the city' this chapter will include resistance of the neighbourhood groups and grassroot initiatives into the discussion. In addition, the work will highlight artistic expressions of city-related matters and define what are their limitations in terms of making a meaningful contribution to urban activism. Holistic review of these manifestations of opposition to the urban processes juxtaposes to key trends and threats of fast-paced and expansive urban redevelopment.

A Construction Site and the Residents

Baku is a city that has been shaped by oil wealth and it shows. The pace of state-owned urban redevelopment and 'beautification' projects have accelerated as the revenues from oil peaked between 2007–2014 (Guliyev, 2016). In addition, construction of residential housing has also expanded, partly to meet the demand of growing population in the capital and partly due to property speculation.

The downtown of Baku has been remade to fit the new image of a global and modern city and for hosting the mega-projects from Eurovision to Formula 1 during the last decade (Gogishvili, 2017). The scale of evictions and relocations of the residents from the Baku downtown has been compared to sweeping remake of Paris' centre by Baron Haussmann (Grant, 2014). Nevertheless, the residents of Baku had no opportunity to participate in this massive remake of their city and they often feel that beautification of the city's visual image is not something done for them, but rather for luring the eyes of outside visitors (ibid). Thus, although oil is visibly intertwined into city's urban fabric, heavy investment into urban redevelopment and sumptuously built structures have been explained as preparation for the transformation into a tourism- and business-driven city in the uncertain post-oil era (Blau and Rupnik, 2018).

In terms of the channels of connection between the residents and local planning authorities it's worth mentioning that the urban governance system of Baku is puzzling. There are several state entities responsible for different bits of urban planning and the role and responsibilities of each is ambiguous (Guliyev, 2017). The residents of Baku have no access to have a say on the governance and policymaking level, given that a mayor is not elected, the head of the executive office of each rayon (district) is also appointed by the president and there are no participatory practices in the planning chain.

The dwellers who do not necessarily agree with the new image of their city mostly elide the rapid change. Only those whose immediate living environment is directly influenced by the redevelopment projects usually show opposition. One of the most common provocations is new residential buildings known as '*novostroyka*' getting built in the middle of a public space that used to be a common good of the residents. The protests usually happen as an appeal of discontent to the responsible executive entity (Icra Hakimiyyəti). The residents also try to attract media outlets to increase the chances that their voices will be heard and it would be possible to stop the occupation of the public space. Protests against new constructions also take place when trees in public parks or backyards get cut (BBC, 2018). Usually, individual residents call the hot-line of the ministry of ecology, if the scale of cutting is large the media gets involved and starts questioning the local authorities. The outcome of such protests is rarely success, given that the construction projects are usually backed by big money and well connected businessmen. The third form of neighbourhood activism happens when a construction company or state-led redevelopment project doesn't offer adequate compensation to the residents. Even though the legal code defines the method for calculation of compensation amount, in practice unfair compensation and sudden eviction of houses without timely notice have caused local scale protests (Safarova, 2017; Azadliq, 2016; Ann, 2014). An image of a woman jumping onto the bulldozer with an axe in her hands, threatening to break its window and to hurt the driver is very symbolic for showcasing the despair of residents (Azadliq, 2013). Even though in some cases the residents have held small demonstrations in front of the official state buildings, mostly the opposition was manifested within the boundaries of a neighbourhood. Due to lack of communication channels with local authorities, the residents end up challenging only the construction workers, who usually have no direct responsibility or control.

Is it Tactical Enough?

To date, the only known initiative that had a certain scale of impact on urban policymaking has been Huseyn Abdullayev's Transport for Baku blog. Even though the evidence is anecdotal, his advocacy may have had an influence on some of the recent urban mobility related policies, such as the installation of ramps for making sidewalks more accessible, implementation of a programme for more secure pedestrian lanes. His blog, which has transformed into a City4people platform, focuses on the transportation challenges in Baku, best practices that exist globally and possible adoption of these practices in his hometown (Transport for Baku). As the result of his active presence in online media, despite coming from a different professional background he has been invited to work as a consultant on a project related to integrated transportation system of Baku and has an opportunity to influence accessibility related policies.

Of urban activist groups, the most notable one is Pillə which was formed by a collective of young architects in 2015. The group has kicked off with a research project on the urban fabric of Baku, to understand better the development path and current situation of the city. Thereafter, the collective focused on awareness building through public lectures, screenings, exhibitions and knowledge-sharing with the residents who would like to be involved in communal activities.

Those activities helped the group to build a presence in the field of urban activism and led to the first intervention in the physical built environment. Urban Olum public art festival involved a residency of four local and three foreign artists, architects and social workers in the Bayıl district (Musavi, 2017). Each individual has carried out his or her own project but overall activities encompassed revitalisation of a pocket park in one of the neighbourhoods and installation of urban furniture in the entrance area of a nine-story building. The main goal was to engage the residents in the process and to facilitate the utilisation of public spaces. The festival strived to show that small scale interventions could be carried out without the involvement of any state entities. In this sense, the

initiative has reached some degree of success, as some of the residents started planting in the urban garden made during the festival and residents of the nine-storey building replaced lamp bulbs in the entrance area. With this project Pillə has tested boundaries of making self-organised interventions into public space. In the aftermath of this project, they were also invited to carry out planning for the revitalisation of public spaces in a khrushcevka complex located in the Netftçilər district, that was initiated by a local philanthropist.

Despite having vast experience and presence in the urban activism scene, the initiative faces several challenges. The members of the group are mostly young architects in their late twenties, that engage in activities of Pillə in their free time after their full-time jobs. This is mostly because practising as an architect remains a professional priority and, partly due to lack of financial opportunities, that initiative has access to fund desired projects. Moreover, absence of a clear-cut strategy and working principles coupled with differing approaches to the process of urban development both influence the dynamics of the group. Despite these challenges, Pillə remains as the only relatively large initiative that keeps the topic of urban development on the agenda and creates a case study for testing premises of hands-on and tactical form of urban activism in Baku.

Interventions into the beautification and utilisation of public space is something that self-initiated residents also do. However, the ownership of public space is not something common and those tactical interventions could incrementally create this feeling. Nevertheless, the attempts of Pilləto influence the development of Baku remain on tactical level and do not challenge the structural issues.

Visual Chronicles of Urban Change: Whom Are They Made For?

Visual arts can make a valuable contribution to urban activism when it introduces critical reading of urban development and is able to draw attention to and facilitate public discussion around certain issues (Murzyn-Kupisz and Dzialek, 2017). Visual tools are also very valuable for professionals and activists involved in planning practise for exploring, understanding and communicating issues of city space (Sandercock and Attilli, 2010; Garrett, 2014). Some works of Azerbaijani artists are very relevant in this context. They have mainly reflected on urban change – comprising

View of the pocket park in Byil District before and after intervention of Pillə in the framework fo the Urban Olum Festival, 2017

Photo: Matthew Soulnechi

Page from Ilkin Huseynov's book, showing how the banners use images of new, modern and growing Baku around a construction site
Photo: Ilkin Huseynov

of 'beautification' efforts in the city, a booming construction sector, and massive infrastructure projects in Baku. Artistic expressions often address both aesthetic impacts of urban transformation and underlying socio-economic issues. Ilkin Huseynov's photo-book and exhibition 'We Apologise for the Temporary Inconvenience' is a good example of a work that acts on both levels. The book consists of the photographs of banners on the fences of ongoing construction sites in Baku and aims to demonstrate how construction has become a permanent component of the urban fabric (Zarkar, 2017). The photos draw attention to an important issue that emerged as a result of slowing down of construction processes due to the currency crisis in 2015–2016 (Guliyev, 2016). Most of the constructions were delayed and has left people who had made advance payments for their houses in limbo.

While Ilkin's project drew attention to the developments on hold, some artists have focused on the demolition of old neighbourhoods for the 'grand urban beautification project'. Two works are particularly outstanding in this context. First, the Mehelle project by Ajam Media Collective is an effort of an international group consisting of photographers, urban activists, academics and filmmakers to document the last years of life in a historical neighbourhood, Sovetsky, before it was put under relentless bulldozers (Zarkar, 2016). Sovetsky, housed over 50,000 people and was bustling with shops and cafes, had a vibrant community life and had strong social nets (Valiyev and Wallwork, 2019). Now the 'cleared' area is being transformed into an expansive central park and road infrastructure.

The Ajam collective has collected social archives, filmed and photographed the last years of life in the neighbourhood, and mapped stories of Sovetsky residents related to certain spots in now vanished place (Wallwork, 2018). Now that Sovetsky is almost totally demolished, multimedia materials on the Mehelle website present a valuable chronicle for those who want to take a glimpse into the life of vanishing old neighbourhoods of Baku. The project has been one of the few platforms that gave a voice to the residents from this endangered neighbourhood, heard in their hardest times.

While Sovetsky had some positive associations among Baku dwellers due to its unique character and vivid community, the neighbourhood depicted in Leyli Gafarova's *Once Upon a Time in Shanghai* film had a different reputation. Located in the formerly industrial part of Baku, Shanghai consisted of informal one-storey settlements with a rail track and a train

passing a couple of times a day through the street. As Zeynalov (2016) mentioned in his article, the residents, fed up with the depraved conditions, couldn't wait for the demolition in hope of receiving adequate compensation that would allow them to move somewhere more comfortable and appealing. Leyli Gafarova in her documentary has filmed the daily life of this neighbourhood located just behind the glasses of Baku's flamboyant skyscrapers, just before it was to face bulldozers in January 2019 (IDFA, 2018, Radio Free Europe, 2019). Some of the residents were protesting against the demolition, due to unfair compensation that wouldn't allow them to relocate in Baku and would push them into the outskirts (Radio Free Europe, 2019). In theory, the film could be a great tool for drawing attention to the situation that the residents of Baku's Shanghai were facing, however the absence of independent media that would cover the process, the lack of a platform for taking action and organising in the defence of city dwellers' rights makes the film a mere, but still valuable chronicle of Baku's neighbourhoods, before they get transformed into designed spaces for capital and tourism.

The issue of utilisation of available visual tools for urban activism is not only the case for Leyli's film. In the current state of urban activism in Baku, there is no tangible bridge connecting the artists and urban advocates. Moreover, the fact that these projects do not get covered by the media and do not reach a vast majority of citizens keeps them locked in a bubble of socially aware, yet more privileged circles of Baku. Despite these pitfalls, critical reading of urban transformation by artists and creation of chronicles of Baku neighbourhoods before they vanish is necessary for establishing the practice of documentation and beneficial for understanding underlying social consequences of Baku's quest in becoming a global city. In its current state urban activism can only respond to local challenges in the best case scenario and the constraining political environment is no help for its advancement. Any form of activism omits the political side of the urban question, and does not challenge any 'structural questions of political economy and other state and power relations' (Wachsmuth, 2018). The result is mostly the aesthetic change that is contested and voices usually just offer design solutions to city's infrastructure. This happens in the backdrop of a more severe restriction of civic space after the NGO crackdown in 2014 after which not only the urban, but all realms of social activism became apolitical.

Scene from Leyli Gafarova's *Once Upon a Time in Shanghai*, a film depicting a child jumping through an active rail-track as part of their daily game-play in available public space

Photo: Leyli Gafarova

Installation at the neighbourhood Rhytms exhibition of Mehelle Project, reflecting the demolition of houses that intervened into the most cozy and private spaces or city dwellers. The writings on the wall are reminisce about Sovetksy's walls in its old days.

Photo: Mike Raybourne

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09

Water Dragon and Cabbage Fields:
Culture and Urban Activism in the City of Kaunas

J. Otto Habeck, Jonas Büchel

This contribution explores the interplay of urban activism with the status of European Capital of Culture. In the light of the expectations that come with this status, it is worthwhile to ask how those who already work towards improving their place – urban activists – encounter the officially designated task of communal improvement. On the example of Kaunas, Lithuania, we present divergent 'temporal logics', that is, divergent understandings of the temporality of art and activism. What nonetheless unites different actors in Kaunas is a shared sense of the recuperative qualities of art and culture.

Prelude

In many cities across Europe and elsewhere, the metaphor of urban pioneers represents a response to widespread perceptions of the respective city – or parts of it – as some sort of desert, along with notions of greyness, monotony, anonymity, indifference and lack of responsibility. Urban pioneers try to overcome the seeming lack of respect and social commitment not just on the part of urban planners, administrators and politicians, but even of neighbours living on the same floor. Against the background of such impression of indifference, urban activists seek to 'awaken' the city, or at least take on responsibility for some place within its confines, metaphorically turning the desert into fertile land.

However, the metaphor of urban pioneers may neglect previous initiatives and physical manifestations of activism, decades or centuries ago. The city represents a mixture of multiple layers of architectural forms, urban furniture and infrastructure. Despite the persistence of the built environment, the city always remains an unfinished project. Simultaneously, the city represents a quarry of sedimented meanings and memories, some of these memories widely shared, others very intimate. Can there be true pioneers on the surface of the sedimented architecture and memories? Can there be true pioneers amidst those who anyhow inhabit and enact the city, those dwelling in the place and reproducing it all the time?

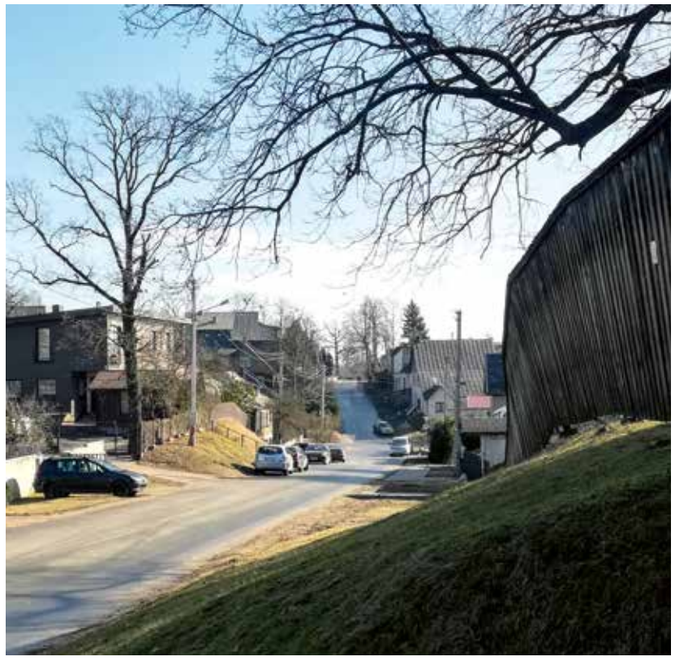


Image 1
Walking along Servitutų gatvė, a street in the upper part of Šančiai
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 28 February 2019

Arrival at Šančiai

We granted ourselves three days in one of the suburbs of Kaunas: Šančiai. On a windy and overcast day, Šančiai received us with its small wooden houses, old factories and former army barracks. Separated from the rest of the city by River Nemunas and a large railway depot, Šančiai itself is divided in an up-hill and lower part (Aukštieji and Žemieji Šančiai) and features different functional zones. The upper part generally emanates a quieter and more individualist atmosphere (Image 1); the villas and gardens along Servitutų gatvė offer a pleasant view across the Nemunas valley. Factories, garage compounds and a railway track at the bottom of the slope demarcate the border between the upper and the lower part. The large red-brick barracks in the middle of the lower part were erected in

Image 2.
Wooden houses in a residential area of Šančiai on a late winter day
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 26 February 2019

the late nineteenth century; after 1945 they were used by the Red Army, abandoned with the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1993, and then left to pilfering and informal appropriation by civilians. Some of the garrison buildings have recently been refurbished (Image 3), emanating an ambience of commercial success and providing lofts for affluent residents. West and north-west of the barracks, along the river, wider and smaller lanes with detached wooden houses (Image 2) on rather tiny plots recall the early decades of the 20th century, when railway and factory workers acquired parcels of a former estate and pursued personal visions of a deserving life. Lithuanian musicians, artists, actors and journalists came to settle in Šančiai in later decades. In Soviet times, the barracks of Lower Šančiai constituted an area of restricted access, in the periphery of which the lanes by the river were not easily accessible despite their civilian use.

Image 3
Two of the not-yet-refurbished former garrison barracks in Šančiai, one of them featuring a mural depicting a couple of doves, with the Church of Jesus' Heart in the background
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 27 February 2019

Image 4
The former site of the cinema *Taika*, now an empty square in the middle of Lower Šančiai
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 26 February 2019

Right next to the one of the most frequented intersections of Lower Šančiai, at a place that may arguably be called the centre of the suburb, two empty plots immediately caught our attention (Image 4). Each the size of a football ground, the two parcels have a neglected and somewhat messy appearance. What had been there before? A year ago? Ten years ago? A hundred years ago?

In search of historical maps, we tried our luck at the suburb's local library. Markers of local identity become immediately visible in the showcases at the library's entrance: photographs of the industrial past are aligned with biographical accounts from Soviet years. While retrieving books on the history of Šančiai, the librarians refer us to Rolanda Girskienė, a teacher and local historian who regularly conducts guided tours through the area (Image 5). From Rolanda we learn that one of the two empty spots was the site of a cinema called Taika – a Lithuanian word for peace – in Soviet times, torn down in 1998 in the frenzy of post-socialist transformation with its prospects of individual commerce, but the project of a petrol station at this site never materialised. The other plot, formerly the site of the first library, was cleared in 2018. A residential house was demolished and an oak tree felled to make space for an automatic car wash. The developer argued that the clearing did no damage to the neighbourhood, as the houses were not listed as cultural heritage. Counter to this

Image 5
Rolanda Girskienė – teacher, tour guide and expert of Šančiai's history – with one of the authors
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 26 February 2019

Image 6
Remnants of the cabbage cellars used by the Czarist Army. The area is now occasionally used for festivities and events such as the 'Cabbage Field Opera'.
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 26 February 2019

Image 7
Evening meeting of local activists at the trash-art centre. A student of architecture explicates the municipality's plans for a new cultural centre in Šančiai.
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 27 February 2019

argument, some local residents say that the richness of these unique examples of early twentieth-century wooden architecture is akin to a grandmothers' heirloom silverware that has become so tarnished that nobody sees its value any more.

At the back of the second plot, a brick building looks inaccessible, detached from the neighbourhood, and somewhat enigmatic. This is the building of New Šančiai's Synagogue (Beit Midrash) constructed in 1929–1932; in the 1950s, the building was extended and turned into a bakery. Clearly marked as a site of interest in the city's tourist maps and guidebooks, the synagogue nonetheless appears to exist outside public space. According to Rolanda Girskienė, the abandoned and sad appearance of the building is mainly due to its unclear status of ownership. In that sense, the synagogue shares the quality of the two plots next to it: spaces of doubt, sites of worrying memories and future ambiguities.

Opera on the Cabbage Fields: Urban Activism in Šančiai

Vita Gelunienė and Irish-born Ed Carroll live in a Šančiai house built by Vita's great grandfather. Locally and internationally known for their combining community art with creating experiences of publicness and urban activism, they have been pursuing a range of community projects: the most recent is the development of an opera based upon the story of a public parcel of land called the Cabbage Field (Kopūstų Laukas). The opera process was developed from scratch and brought together dozens of professional and non-professional singers, dancers and artists from across the neighbourhood. 29 December 2018 saw the first performance of the (as of yet, incomplete) opera.

The history of this area's red-brick cellars, which in the times of the Russian Empire used to be storage facilities for the soldiers' provisions of fermented cabbage (Image 6), had almost sunk into oblivion when Vita, Ed and others came across these cellars. Clearing the brick caverns from garbage was a collective task that involved activists and local people. Creating a new experience of public space in the Cabbage Fields and more generally, in the suburb, the project became a springboard for other activities, such as a carnivalesque parade along the main thoroughfare of Lower Šančiai in 2017. Such bottom-up activities are about mobilising residents and others, creating the bonds and bridges that are vital

for the production of social and spatial capital, and hence for community sustainability.

We were given the opportunity to attend one of the neighbourhood meetings, found ourselves at a large white table in a trash-art recycling centre (Image 7) and got to know activists of different ages and walks of life. This is activism not just *for*, but sometimes *against* something, e.g. agitation against the car wash to be constructed on the site next to the synagogue. As Ed says, many developments attracted to the area are equivalent to 'mining a space to extract the resource without giving anything back to the community. The car wash is a type of turbo capitalism that does not leave anything behind. When it is no longer profitable, the business will go away without responsibility for what is left behind. Such economy of extraction is problematic.' (Image 8)

Protests against the car wash turned out to be successful: the city council decided in late February 2019 to tighten regulations about the zoning of such facilities in residential areas, requiring a distance of 50 metres. The emptiness of the spot in the centre of Šančiai is hard to read (Image 9). Is it a site of post-industrial melancholia, a result of civic activism or of greedy capitalism? Vita and Ed suggest that the empty spot is a narrative of a conflict between private and public interest. In this regard, they

Image 8
Ed Carroll explaining the activities of the Lower Šančiai Community Association (Žemųjų Šančių bendruomenė)
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 27 February 2019

Image 9
An empty plot adjacent to the busiest intersection of Lower Šančiai. The project of constructing a car wash was halted by Šančiai activists.
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 26 February 2019

associate their experience with Giorgio Agamben's view[1] that the single ways, acts and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life (*potenza*).

Being asked whether there is a need for 'urban pioneers' in a city like Kaunas, Ed offered a positive view: it is upon everyone to be pioneers who value doing-it-together, building social solidarity and claiming 'our right to the city, a right to take decisions about our life'. Art – and participatory art in particular – awaken dormant qualities in people, providing them with a language to work with the potential of such spaces.

Vita and Ed are community artists who with others founded in 2014 the Lower Šančiai Community Association (Žemųjų Šančių bendruomenė).[2] It has an active social media platform with more than 3,000 group members on Facebook who get involved in the community development of this suburb, cooperating with the municipality's agencies for urban planning and simultaneously holding them accountable for the lack of participative processes when necessary.

When we asked Vita about her position towards Kaunas's successful application as European Capital of Culture in 2022, she was concerned that the implementation process engenders a type of 'pioneer' or community agents' philosophy in its own right – one that presupposes that culture must be developed from scratch, at the risk of ignoring or appropriating already existing initiatives. Ed's concern is that community and people should not be treated as objects to be branded but rather as active subjects with dissonant voices about the transformation of the city.

Enter the Water Dragon: Kaunas Becoming a European Capital of Culture

Mid-day sun in a spacious office-cum-lobby in the city centre of Kaunas. Virginija Vitkienė and Ana Čižauskienė (Image 10) share with us their vision of Kaunas as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2022. With Lithuania's turn to nominate a city, Kaunas competed with several other candidates throughout the country. Against the background of Kaunas having had the status of temporary capital of Lithuania in the inter-war period – during the years when Vilnius and the east of the country were under Polish annexation – the designers of the ECoC bid[3] chose the label contemporary capital, trying to overcome the pervasive feeling of

Image 10
Virginija Vitkienė and Ana Čižauskienė in the office of Kaunas European Capital of Culture 2022.
Photo: Jonas Büchel, 28 February 2019

1 Quoted by Stavrides, Stavros, 'The Potentials of Space Commoning: The Capacity to Act and Think Through Space', in Dockx, Nico, and Gielen, Pascal (eds), *Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real* (Amsterdam: Antennae Arts in Society, 2018), pp. 345–363, here p. 349.

2 Žemųjų Šančių Bendruomenė [Community of Lower Šančiai] Facebook group. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/445643732224925/> accessed 17 December 2019.

3 Vitkienė, Virginija et al., *Kaunas Contemporary Capital, Candidate City, European Capital of Culture* (Kaunas: Kaunas City Municipality, 2017), <https://lrkm.lrv.lt/uploads/lrkm/documents/files/Kaunas_2022_ECoC_final_bid_EN(1).pdf> accessed 17 December 2019.

Image 11
'The Mythical Beast of Kaunas': sketch on an aerial image of the city centre
Photo: Published in the ECoC bid book of Kaunas (see reference)

'second-city-ism', with Kaunas being continually outshone by Vilnius. The interviewees say that the city has not come to terms with its painful and contradictory history, ripe with the construction of fortresses, multiple occupations, military take-overs and war-time experiences. This history is aggravated by the fact that more than 30,000 Jews were murdered in the early 1940s.

In the light of disparate memories, the city requires a new myth for its citizens to develop some sense of collectiveness. Preparing the ECoC bid on behalf of the city's administration, Virginija and her team focused on the city's location on steep river banks and the many old fortresses and caves: they started creating the myth of a beast, resembling a water dragon, that lives in a subterranean maze of darkness and water (Image 11). An animal neither benevolent nor bad, the beast has a long-standing contract with the city, but the contract has been occasionally broken by both parties and the beast has not shown itself for a long period. Children across the city are encouraged to tell or draw their version of the beast. The official launch of ECoC in January 2022 carries the slogan 'Wake up, beast!' and will entail much music and noise; instead of the fireworks conventionally conducted at ECoC openings, one of the long-unfinished tower blocks in the city centre will be torn down. Virginija states that the symbolic and factual demolition of these eerie buildings has the potential to make people breathe again – in our words, the lurking presence of these grim constructions will be sacrificed to set the ground for an intensive engagement with the citizens' multiple memories. Subsequent reconstruction will proceed in the limelight of growing numbers of visitors, redirecting public attention from Vilnius to Kaunas and thus freeing the latter from the symbolic burden of second-city-ism for at least a couple of years.

This is likely to be the only (and wilful) destructive moment of Kaunas ECoC 2022. The programme contains numerous events and activities, all with the aim of making citizens aware that it is their part to take on the cultural legacy of Kaunas and take it further in creative ways. In the current phase of 'ignition' and 'agitation' of ECoC 2022, the city's universities, cultural organisations, local NGOs and international experts have jointly established a programme with the title 'Tempo Academy of Culture', devoted to capacity building among culture professionals (in both the municipal sector and independent groups), community-cultural activists, youth, volunteer managers and people working in the local tourist industry. This may serve as a prime interface for the city's incumbent status of contemporary capital of culture and the suburbs' artists, activists and culture workers, to develop jointly a meshwork of narratives, strategies and projects for the future of Kaunas.

In addition to the 'Tempo Academy of Culture' as a capacity-building programme for community activists, ECoC managers launched the community programme WE THE PEOPLE as a platform for long-term commitment and activism processes all over Kaunas, its outskirts and neighbourhoods, hoping to strengthen initiatives like that in Šančiai. The programme embraces two parts: 'Fluxus Labs' in Kaunas itself and 'Contemporary Neighbourhoods' in the city's vicinity with several thousand people involved. These programmes seek to endorse networking of people and organisations to discuss strategies of urban development. In sum, then, the main goal of the 'agitation' period is the creation of a platform for capacity building for culture professionals, youth, community

activists, volunteers and the hospitality sector in order to make them the real owners of Kaunas 2022 programme and legacy.

What emerged in part of the interviews is the idea that Kaunas finds itself in a state of ill-being or suffering, and that the ECoC initiative could work to heal that pain – healing by means of reconciliation. However, the urban activists that we met maintain a different position. To a tourist who is ready to consume the city, spaces in urban landscape may perhaps appear dull, indifferent, or empty; but such spaces conceal manifold things of immediate significance for local inhabitants. These spaces create a pause: a chance to rethink about the commons, and a moment in time to initiate changes – not because there is a need to cure the empty space but because the latter opens up a potential for a different order. Such public spaces signal the city's health, they should be nourished in order to balance the dominance of a neoliberal order.

Conclusion: Different Temporal Logics in an Emerging European Capital of Culture

Some authors argue that the title 'European Capital of Culture' (along with the process of applying for it) carries notions of competition, branding and a market-oriented logic.[4] Municipalities take it upon themselves the charge of promoting a shared European identity. On the one hand, the imminent status of European Capital of Culture is already an achievement of the city shedding its old image, removing the tarnish from the silverware, so to speak. The title is based on the acknowledgement that the city deserves the title because of a distinct history and citizens' awareness of their place. In the case of Kaunas, modernist architecture of the inter-war period is an asset in this.[5] On the other hand, a city that bears the title of European Capital of Culture is expected to 'grow' culturally and to 'improve' itself. Although there may be no clearly defined criteria by which to measure success, the city is expected to be aware of its own 'becoming'. The ECoC initiative also seeks to clarify the message which Kaunas can spread through Europe in 2022 and thereafter, with a clear commitment to strengthening a common European identity.

The initiative of turning Kaunas into the 2022 European Capital of Culture currently passes the period of 'agitation'. The word itself makes sense to all protagonists of our brief essay, but agitation means partially different things for different actors. In the temporal logic of ECoC stewardship, agitation is the phase between ignition and explosion (and thereafter, legacy). These words imply a metaphor of a fire that causes a multi-colour barrel to blast, with splashing colours putting the existing cultural landscape of Kaunas into high relief.

By contrast, participatory art does not have a finite temporal logic. François Matarasso, one of the movement's renowned proponents, sees it as a 'restless art' and exemplifies this by reference to the Lower Šančiai Community Association.[6] For urban activists in Šančiai, 'agitation' denotes an ongoing commitment to action and by necessity remains incomplete and always open-ended. Šančių Opera, carnivals, manifestations and other events mark emotionally loaded moments, momentary closures which usher in new phases in the cycle of local life. We believe it is important to acknowledge this difference in temporal logics between the concept of ECoC, on the one hand, and Šančiai's activists, on the other: this difference is not the least among the conditions that might make cooperation a challenge. Acknowledging both the temporal logic of acme and that of ongoing engagement may help design a common frame for art and activism. Citizens' active participation in art and urban planning requires time and trust; it is again an open-ended, hopefully permanent process to be shouldered by many, old and young.

A final thought: upon our previous experience and perusal of literature on European capitals of Culture, we expected to identify a theme of collective self-improvement in the bid and programme of Kaunas 2022. In addition to the idea of such self-improvement, however, another pervasive strand emerged. Its theme is reconciliation – a sort of cure for the city with its controversial, fragmented and partially suppressed memories, sedimented under layers of dust and rubble. ECoC managers and Šančiai activists alike play a pioneering role in removing and creatively re-using that debris.

4 Habit, Daniel, *Die Inszenierung Europas? Kulturhauptstädte zwischen EU-Europäisierung, Cultural Governance und lokalen Eigenlogiken* (Münster: Waxmann, 2011).

5 Reklaitė, Julia (ed.), *Architekturführer Kaunas* (Berlin: DOM publishers, 2016). Originally published in Lithuanian: Reklaitė, Julija (sudarė), *Kaunas 1918–2015: architektūros gidas* (Vilnius: LAPAS, 2015).

6 Matarasso, François, *A Restless Art: How Participation Won, and Why it Matters* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2019), here: book title and p. 55, <https://arestlessart.com/the-book/download-a-digital-copy/> accessed 17 December 2019).

10

Urban Activism and Planning in Ukraine and Russia

Carola Neugebauer, Andrei Semenov, Olena Denysenko

Citizens and urban planning are intrinsically linked, yet the nexus between them changes and is an issue of potential contestation. Planning and citizens are bound in two respects today. From the normative perspective, planning is a political activity that focuses on citizen needs. It is commissioned to design the socio-material transformation of a defined territory for the sake of the public. The whole planning system and process serves to adjudicate between various (local) interests linked to space, and to make political decisions for the benefit of the public. From a procedural point of view, today's urban planning constitutes a mode of governance. It results from the interplay of many concerned stakeholders: the city administrations whose planners steer the planning process, political bodies (the mayor, city council and advisory committees) who discuss, approve and initiate planning, as well as intervening citizens and private businessmen. Image 1 shows the general formal channels for stakeholder intervention in planning, which is defined by planning legislation and political institutions, and which shape the stakeholders' opportunities for informal interactions (e.g. via personal ties and other arenas like the public and social media).

Figure 1:
Interactions in urban planning
Source: Carola Neugebauer

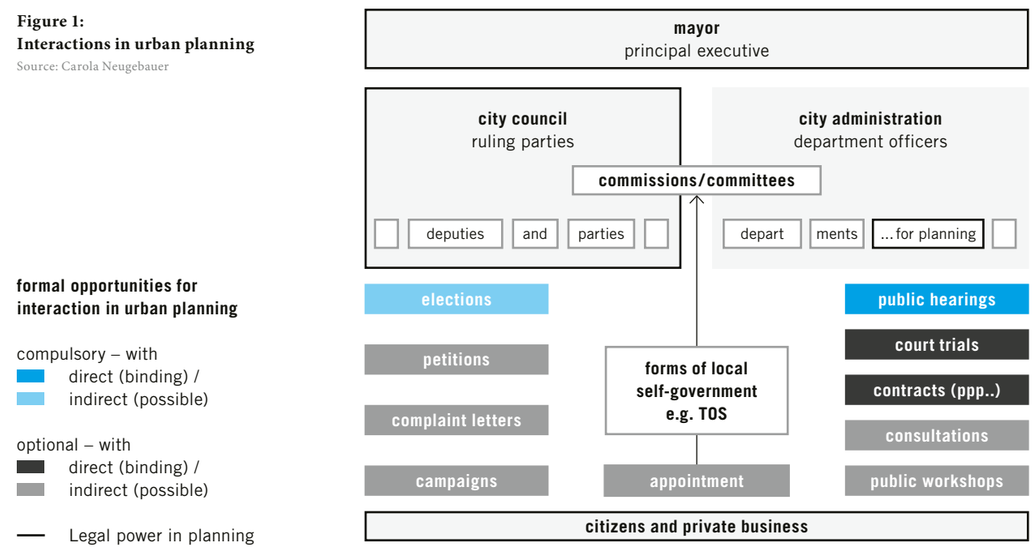


Image 2
This photograph shows the new square in Perm's micro district Krasnova which activists received as compensation for the lost one.
Photo: Carola Neugebauer, 2018

In this vein, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the first decade thereafter witnessed revolutionary change in the citizen-planning nexus for the first time. After decades of centralised planning run by political elites and professionals who strove to achieve socio-economic modernisation and provide public welfare in the Soviet Union, the state largely withdrew from envisioning the social-material future of cities. Neoliberal ideology and practices started to spread across the post-Soviet states after 1991 and urban development was detached from planning. The polarisation of space and society became a predominant feature of change, leading to ad absurdum visions of sustainable development and public welfare. Civil society shifted from 'state-controlled associational life' under socialism to 'Western-sponsored "liberal" civil society', which remained weak in issues of urban planning and development.[1]

1 Jacobsson, Kerstin, 'Introduction: The Development of Urban Movements in Central and Eastern Europe', in Jacobsson, Kerstin, Saxonberg, Steven, *Social Movements in Post-Communist Europe and Russia* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1–32, here p. 3.

2 Appenzeller, Markus, 'Urban Planning and Governance', in Brade, Isolde, and Neugebauer, Carola (eds), *Urban Eurasia – Cities in Transformation* (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2017), pp. 266–273.

3 See the Russian Urban Code (2002) as well as Ukraine's Law On the Planning and Development of Territories (2000), which are the basis of subsequent national and regional regulations.

4 Jacobsson 2015: 3

5 Gestring, Norbert, Ruhne, Renate, and Wehrheim, Jan, 'Einleitung', in Gestring, Norbert, Ruhne, Renate, and Wehrheim, Jan (eds), *Stadt und soziale Bewegungen* (Wiesbaden: Springer 2014), pp. 7–21, here p. 7.

6 The research project 'TRIPAR: Shifting Paradigms – Towards Participatory and Effective Urban Planning in Ukraine, Russia and Germany' was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (2016–2018). The paper here refers to the following empirical data set: 27 interviews in Vinnytsia and 23 in Perm on media-based conflicts screening covering the years 2000–2016 as well as in-depth conflict analysis, based on further document analysis and expert interviews.

Since the mid-2000s, this early post-socialist interplay of urban development, planning and citizens has taken another turn. Public authorities have shown fresh interest and activity in planning, which was signalled by reforms of formal land use and associated planning instruments (i.e. general planning and detailed planning) and the introduction of new planning approaches such as strategic planning.[2] New laws institutionalised mandatory and voluntary forms of civic participation in planning.[3] Apart from that, citizens showed a generally 'more diverse civic life' including 'urban grassroots activism'[4] that appropriated urban spaces as 'scenes', 'mobilisation space' and 'objects of contestation'[5]. More specifically, many local conflicts arose around planning projects of urban renewal, underlining the awakened interest among citizens in urban development and planning. This new interest suggests that the re-definition of the nexus between urban planning and citizens is an ongoing and contentious process.

Thus, we can explore how this nexus actually is conceived and practised at the local level today. How and why do local citizens intervene in urban planning, and what is their power as urban activists in planning? Based on the empirical findings of the TRIPAR research project[6] examining urban planning conflicts in Vinnytsia (Ukraine) and Perm (Russia), we approach these questions and try to summarise our key findings in three overarching observations.

Urban Activism in Planning Fights for the Spaces of Daily Life

Citizen activism in Vinnytsia and Perm is closely linked to everyday life. Planned construction projects that directly affect and threaten spaces of everydayness often trigger activism. Activists often fight for their neighbourhoods and backyards against infill construction and the demolition of green spaces. In Perm's micro district of Krasnova, residents protested against the construction of a new shopping centre that would replace a green space. Having learned of the planning project at a late stage – mandatory public hearings were not held – citizens could not stop the construction ultimately, despite a variety of tactics including lawsuits. Thanks to their collective efforts, however, they negotiated with the city administration to rectify the situation and furnish a new square nearby (Image 2).

Image 3
Vinnytsia's micro district Vyshenka, a new residential block, which compensated the developer for the sports ground renewal
Photo: Olena Denysenko, 2017

Image 4
The new sports ground of School 18 in Vinnytsia
Photo: Carola Neugebauer, 2017

Image 5
The Nightingale Garden in Perm and some key activists on the left
Photo: Carola Neugebauer, 2018

In Vinnytsia's micro-district of Vyshenka, residents in loose cooperation with local oppositional politicians and businessmen struggled to protect the spacious, if run-down sports and leisure grounds of School 18. Based on an investment agreement between the city and a developer, the territory was re-designed: two new residential blocks and a new, much smaller sportsground were proposed for construction. Facing the threat of physical violence from a powerful public-private alliance, urban activists managed to prevent the construction of the second residential high-rise (Images 3 and 4).

But urban activism in Perm and Vinnytsia also goes beyond the neighbourhood level, as the conflict cases of the Nightingale Garden and the Cloud Shopping Centre exemplify. In Perm, urban activists have managed to defend the green valley of the small river Uinka – known as Nightingales' Garden – as a natural reserve and recreational area of citywide importance against the encroachment of landowners and developers. Urban environmentalists and residents cooperated professionally over a number of years, eliciting broad attention via the collective cleaning of the territory, festivals on the site and the forging of temporal alliances with members of city administration (Image 5).

The conflict around the Cloud shopping centre in Vinnytsia represents a case of urban activism linked to symbolically important places of everydayness. Facing a strong alliance of public authorities (mayor and city administration) and developers, Vinnytsia activists fought against the construction of a shopping mall on a dilapidated square in the downtown next

to a historic church. With loud, yet spontaneous and splintered forms of contestation, they were able to bring about slight changes in the architectural design of the project (Image 6).

Notwithstanding the particularities of each of the mentioned conflict cases in Perm and Vinnytsia, they are representative of the manifold and common experiences in daily life of arbitrary and opaque transformation of urban spaces. These everyday experiences resonate with multi-layered conceptions of planning that urban activists have. On the one hand, they perceive planning as an intrusion that can threaten their life quality; something with which they must contend. People rarely know of the specifics behind urban planning processes in the beginning of a conflict, and urban activists struggle hard to acquire this knowledge and expertise. On the other hand, few urban activists conceive of urban planning as a chance and tool for voicing their interests, to envision and co-decide the city's future.

The majority of experienced urban activists in Vinnytsia and Perm tend to perceive and use urban planning as an ultimate chance to defend 'their rights' to urban space. They appeal to the legally binding and enforceable character of land use planning and regulations in a defensive way, instead of turning to participatory or even co-productive urban planning. They want planning to be a reliable and effective instrument that sets and implements binding standards and norms for urban space use for everybody. Court appeals, such as the conflict cases of School 18 and the Nightingale's Garden, are common practice for urban activists in planning who follow the above conception of planning.

In sum, we observe that urban spaces of the everyday life are central for civic activism in Vinnytsia and Perm. These spaces – either in the people's backyards, neighbourhoods or in the city as a whole – are the primary objects of contestation. They serve as scenes for protests and actions to underline the activists' claims. In doing so, active citizens perceive of and use urban planning primarily as tool to defend their rights to the urban space. In this vein, it seems premature to reduce this kind of urban activism in Vinnytsia and Perm to a Western-style NIMBYism.[7] Rather, it covers urban spaces beyond the backyards and neighbourhoods, too. Moreover, it tends to be more than the 'mere disagreement'[8] on 'kindergartens in one's own neighbourhood perceived as too loud'[9] and the individual fear of diminishing property values, but a broader and critical

7 Gestring et al. (2014:11) defines NIMBY, against the background of Western European experiences, as follows: 'What the initiatives called NIMBYs have in common is their primary focus and remaining on the local. It is explicitly not about a critical examination of changes in society as a whole. Sociopolitical questions such as automobilisation, the social status of children or the handling of drugs are explicitly not focused on. Only local topics and critical assessments of developments are of interest' (authors' translation).

8 Özdemir, Esin, and Tasan-Kok, Tuna, 'Planners' Role in Accommodating Citizen Disagreement: The Case of Dutch Urban Planning', *Urban Studies*, vol. 56, no. 4 (2017), pp. 741-759, here p. 743.

9 Gestring et al. 2014:10

Image 6
The contested Cloud Shopping Centre in the city centre of Vinnytsia
Photo: Olena Denysenko 2017

consciousness for actual patterns and processes of urban development as we will argue below.

Urban Activism in Planning Goes Beyond Dichotomies

The examples of local planning conflicts in Vinnytsia and Perm reveal the diversity of structures, practices and values in urban activism. Indeed, the active citizens are young and old, experienced or beginners in activism of progressive or conservative attitudes. They strive for short and long term objectives in local and citywide issues of urban development. And even though they unify in the interest of defending their sense of place, their values and visions for the future city seem less clear and homogenous.[10]

In this regard – and contrary to conventional wisdom – our research shows that activism in urban planning in Ukraine and Russia is not apolitical per se. Rather, it challenges the binary of political versus apolitical thinking. Many of the local activists in Vinnytsia and Perm are aware of the power structures and mechanisms at play in urban development;

10 Activists often claim to be for a 'comfortable' and 'sustainable city'. However, these buzzwords conceal heterogeneous values and objectives for the future city, which are very likely to clash once they have to negotiate on the ground.

they are conscious of their limited power resources and often critical towards the elites. Many of the activists in urban planning show a political consciousness; regardless of whether they run for the same values and visions for the future city or if they fight for their backyards or spaces and issues beyond. At least in a broad and vague way, they think about 'overall societal changes'[11] and 'the design of coexistence in cities'[12] that are considered constitutive issues for social movements[13] and are different from NIMBYs.

Dichotomous thinking also seems misleading with regard to activist practices of pursuing their interests. When looking at co-operation in urban activism, for example, the boundary between formal, institutionally embedded interactions and informality blurs and the frontier between camps – i.e. between adversaries and friends alike. While the activists in Vinnytsia and Perm also act on their own (e.g. in the case of the Cloud Shopping Centre), they often forge 'heterogeneous alliances'[14] with other groups of active citizens as well as with stakeholders beyond civil society. Among each other, activist groups exchange experiences and support each other. In the cases of Nightingale's Garden and School 18, for example, the tenants as beginners in activism were backed-up and motivated by professionalised, citywide activist groups and experts (e.g. lawyers and architects).

While this cooperation between groups of activists rely on informality (on personal ties and reciprocity) the cooperation between activists and public authorities starts with formal channels offered by the local political and planning system (Image 1). Yet, the mandatory and direct modes of citizen involvement in urban planning like the public hearings often stay hollow, 'fictitious' (journalist 2, Vinnytsia)[15] and unsatisfying for the activists.

Thus, the activists also work with other formal channels. For example, they manage to attract the support of public representatives, e.g. local council members or department officers. They also work via local bodies of self-government (e.g. TOS – Terririal'noe Obshchestvennoe Samoupravlenie). These interactions constitute formally backed up alliances between state persons and civil activists. However, instead of granting the benefits of formal, institutionally embedded cooperation, these interactions rather show features of informality: They depend on individual willingness, on the specific moment and situation instead of being general, stable and reliable in nature. Moreover, the state-civic interactions appear still often as 'alliances of the weaker', since they base on those formal channels which are indirectly linked to planning processes only (Image 1), and often involve public representatives who are marginalised in current decision-making processes (e.g. deputies in opposition and department officers neighbouring the urban planning division). The newly emerging arrangements of formal public-civic cooperation in Vinnytsia and Perm – such as attempts toward strategic planning in Perm or activist representation in public advisory bodies – may change that and turn towards more stability in interaction and civic power in planning. In any case, however, these conflict cases underline the variety and flexibility of urban activist practices, and suggest the need for a reassessment of dichotomies like formality and informality, friend and adversary, cooperation and co-optation.

11 Gestring et al. 2014:11, translated by author

12 Gestring et al. 2014:9, translated by author

13 Gestring et al. 2014, cf. Mayer, Margit, 'Soziale Bewegungen in Städten – städtische soziale Bewegungen', in Gestring, Norbert, Ruhne, Renate, and Wehrheim, Jan (eds), *Stadt und soziale Bewegungen* (Wiesbaden: Springer 2014), p. 25–42.

14 Jacobsson 2015:5

15 Interview with a journalist, June 2017, in Kyiv, Ukraine (anonymized)

16 Interview with a journalist, June 2017, in Kyiv, Ukraine (anonymized)

17 To quote a Kyiv local politician: 'In those cases, where it`s obvious that interests of authorities and community are not overlapping, and community still protests, the community does not have any chance of winning'.

The Limited Power of Activism

Though we document a robust and, to an extent, growing engagement of the residents with the issues of urban development and planning, so far outcomes remained limited. On the one hand, there are small successes such as victories in the courts, slight changes in design or concessions from the local authorities. On the other hand, reforms in urban institutions that also followed civic initiatives in Ukraine/Vinnytsia, claim to strengthen citizen involvement in urban planning. As activism grows in scale and magnitude, its potential power is obvious.

At the same time, its real impact and power is questionable for various reasons. A primary constraint is the thinking of the other local stakeholders in business, policy and public authorities: They neither consider citizens and activists equal partners in urban planning and development, nor do they want them to become so. There is still some 'systematic lack of readiness of the city authorities to listen to the public opinion' (journalist 2: Kyiv).[16] Few of them are willing to better inform citizens about the issues of planning and elicit their comments and advices, however, they reject unanimously any form of civic co-decision in planning.[17] In addition, urban activists themselves aspire to little. Most activists strive for comprehensive and transparent information about the project and its outcomes; few seek an advisory, co-productive role in planning processes, as outlined above.

The practices of urban planning reinforce this conceptualised inequality of stakeholders and the relative powerlessness of urban activists. According to our research, key sources and practices of activist powerlessness include three important elements. Firstly, there is limited knowledge about the planning system and its institutionalised forms of civic participation. While many urban activists work hard to acquire expertise in legislation and to access current information, it is the city administration that is legally in charge of showing current planning and of organising the civic participation in urban planning (e.g. to hold and announce public hearings and to consider petitions). However, either purposely or out of ignorance,[18] public authorities keep the legal environment opaque for citizens. The legal compliance of this behaviour is too rarely checked by court trials due to the high costs for the urban activists.

A second element is limited access to political bodies and representatives at the local level. Even though political bodies, in particular the mayor and city council, have great power in planning and, even though they are directly accountable to citizens, urban activists lack access to them. To some extent, activists themselves disregard the nexus between urban policy and planning due to this lack of knowledge, the general mistrust in politicians[19] or due to concrete experiences of failure. Primarily however, the extent to which active citizens are listened to and supported in urban planning and governance processes depends on the urban political regime (the constellation of actors, resources and strategies that underpin the mode of local governance). The political regimes in Vinnytsia and Perm differ in detail, yet they coincide with the current predominance of powerful political-economic alliances that are able to set the agenda for urban development and planning on their own vis-à-vis the primarily passive city administrations. They show no coherent pattern and show no signs of improved responsiveness to urban activists.

The third element concerns the complexities of property rights in urban development. The issue of property rights and the process of land allocation are outside of the scope of urban planning. Yet, they are an outstanding power resource in urban planning and governance processes. Property rights mattered in all conflict cases in Vinnytsia and Perm. While referring to the wide-spread, one-sided and liberal understanding of property right – namely as the right to use property for one's own benefits without any commitment to the community – property owners are able to put pressure on policy and city administrations and thus to manipulate planning documents in their favour. Urban activists, in contrast, are usually not big property owners. Usually they even face serious difficulties keeping track of current patterns of land ownership and processes of land allocation.

18 In Soviet times urban planning documents were inaccessible for the public.

19 This may stem from the Soviet past, when public administration and party were often perceived as one bloc. It seems, however, more important that citizens today are aware of the actually high infiltration of local business elites into political bodies directly and into administrative bodies indirectly.

Final Remarks

In view of these conceived and practiced power hierarchies in urban planning and governance, civic participation in Perm's and Vinnytsia's planning constitute an important counter-part. Urban activists fight for essential qualities of urban life while contesting elitist and authoritarian urban regimes. In doing so, they network within civil society – also beyond the neighbourhood level – and engage in cooperation with those stakeholders in city administration and local politics who stand for changes in urban development. Changes in planning projects as well as recent institutional reforms are direct or indirect outputs of their activism.

At the same time, however, urban activists in Vinnytsia and Perm have not managed to challenge and mitigate the decisive power resources of local politico-economic elites. The 'costs of collective action' are very high and the produced outputs are unclear to induce the education and mobilisation of wider citizen groups. Urban stakeholders in politics, economy and administration for their part are neither supporting, nor interested in the urban activist agenda of change in planning and governance. Even public authorities – presumably experts on sustainable urban development and accountable to citizen needs – do not show a general and coherent pattern indicative of an improved responsiveness to urban activists. A paradigmatic shift in urban planning – namely towards more responsiveness to citizens and responsibility for the public good – seems still far away.

Photo Report from

ULAN-UDE

Anatoly Breslavsky,
Elena Stein

Participants of School of Urban Pioneers in Ulan-Ude, April 2019
Photo: Evgeny Mitupov

Participants of the School of Urban Pioneers at the end of the training programme
The majority of the participants in the School of Urban Pioneers project were engaged young people who had not previously been the leaders of formalised, registered urban communities or businessmen. For modern Ulan-Ude, this situation is quite normal. There are only few activist communities that carry out systematic and consistent activities in the city. The School of Urban Pioneers (SUP) gave the participants a unique opportunity to strengthen their skills in the main areas of project activities and social entrepreneurship, to bring their individual ideas to a new project level, and most importantly–to unite and create a network of active and caring citizens of Ulan-Ude.
Photo: Eugene Mitupov, April 2019, Ulan-Ude

Art space ArtTochka–Youth Centre of Street Subcultures, Street Art and Extreme Sports
Probably the only really noticeable youth art space in Ulan-Ude is the street subcultures and street art centre 'Art-Tochka', which unites relatively few representatives of these communities so far. Mainly such topics as urban design, architecture and development of urban art spaces have not been widely spread in Ulan-Ude, which is largely due to the lack of an educational environment (institutions) in which experts could be formed.
Photo: Evgeny Mitupov, April 2019, Ulan-Ude

Event of one of the Ulan-Ude TPS
Territorial Public Self-Governments (TPSs; Russian: Terririal'noe Obshchestvennoe Samoupravlenie) in Ulan-Ude are real examples of self-organisation of citizens to address various issues of local importance at the grassroots level, when the citizens themselves take responsibility for the development of their territories, self-organise and involve their neighbours in their communities. The Ulan-Ude TPS Association includes more than 60 TPS of the city, which are actually operating lower-level urban communities. As a rule, TPS leaders of Ulan-Ude face the same problems as novice young activists–they have a desire to change the situation around them, implement their ideas and projects, but often they lack knowledge and skills in the field of project activities.
Photo: Julia Skvortsova, 2019, Ulan-Ude

At one of the regular 'Time to Separate' events for separate waste collection
In practice, many socially significant youth initiatives find moral support among those residents of Ulan-Ude who care about the future of the city. In this sense, Ulan-Ude is not spoilt by large projects that have been implemented, and each new initiative is usually supported in social networks, and the state and municipal structures are ready to provide the initiators with at least educational support. This is especially noticeable in recent years. Thus, for example, the project in the field of environmental education, separate collection of household waste and eco-friendly lifestyle, the organisers of which were trained by the School of Urban Pioneers, became one of the most active initiatives, and managed to organise group activity around themselves, turned out to be of interest to the wider urban community.
Photo: Tatiana Nikiforova, May 2019, Ulan-Ude

City improvement by different urban communities
The community of young local activists is still very small and unstable. Its borders and composition are extremely fluid, and the resources and channels for renewal are not obvious. The success and viability of an initiative depends heavily on the specific leaders of urban communities and their involvement in project work. The weak development of youth social entrepreneurship and the unwillingness of the vast majority of urban dwellers to financially support youth initiatives also make the situation of aspiring urban activists unsustainable.
Photo: Valentina Kononova, May 2019, Ulan-Ude

Photo Report from

CHELYABINSK

Lev Vladov, Elena Stein

Restoration of a historic house on Rossiyskaya street in Chelyabinsk, August 2018
Chelyabinskii urbanist

'Chelyabinskii Urbanist' team discusses the development of a website of candidates for deputies, March 2019
Many citizens want to participate in the management of the city, but do not belong to any party. We decided to give independent candidates the opportunity to tell voters about themselves. We have created a platform that brings together citizens and voters who decide to represent their interests as deputies, as well as to give independent candidates for municipal deputies the opportunity to introduce themselves to the electorate. Residents can choose their districts and see the profiles of all the candidates who have applied for it.
Chelyabinskii urbanist

Photo from a lecture for student journalists, December 2018
At a lecture for future journalists at the Chelyabinsk State University, Lev Vladov spoke about how he made his posts readable: 'I am not a journalist, but it does not prevent me from writing:
1. what I care about;
2. what I admire;
3. about my dreams and goals.
I think that everyone can write. I think the more people write honestly about what they think is important, the more transparent and understandable the society will become. The main thing is to be honest with yourself and your readers. And never write someone else's opinion for money. Don't forget, the media is a very powerful weapon. Your work will certainly pay off. But never write if there is no fire in your heart. Write when you are on fire. Then it will be fiery.'
Chelyabinskii urbanist

Right page bottom:
Campaign to mark the removal of a pedestrian crossing, March 2019
Chelyabinskii urbanist

Picture with twister (Chelyabinsk people play twister on the site created by the team of the Chelyabinsk Urbanist, 2017)
This is an example of tactical urbanism, a form of implementation of small steps in the field of urban development with little effort and expense. After some changes, on the territory behind the Public Library in Chelyabinsk one is now able to borrow real books for free. It is also possible to download interesting works through a QR-code and read them on a mobile device. There is also a place for playing chess and twister, sitting around and reading.
Chelyabinskii urbanist

Pedestrian crossing: action to remove the pedestrian crossing, March 2019
To draw attention to the problem of the pedestrian crossing, where the local authorities forgot to draw a zebra, we created an art object on Nagornaya Street in October 2017. We managed to draw attention to the problem, so the whole city and the media started talking about our transition. The broadcasts of how we painted the transition was watched live by 50,000 people all over the country. The traffic police called the marking illegal and ordered its erasure. In agreement with the authorities, it was possible to repaint the pedestrian into a standard type in order to reduce the risk to pedestrians.
Chelyabinskii urbanist

‘We turn dirty transformer cabinets into art objects. This helps protect them from ads and improves the look of the city. Practice shows that vandals do not put ads on art objects. By painting boxes, we make the city brighter and give people a piece of happiness’.

Chelybinskii urbanist

Photo Report from

YEREVAN

Silvia Stöber

Around 2010 a bigger protest movement was developed by young activists in Armenia. They organised themselves in groups via Facebook to tackle specific problems. One of them was the Mashtots park movement pictured here. Together with local residents they organised successful protest actions against the construction of a shopping centre on a green space in the city centre of Yerevan.

Photo: Silvia Stöber, 19 September 2010, city centre Yerevan

Pages 166–167:

After the ruling Republican party had prevented Pashinyan's election as Prime Minister in the first vote in the parliament on 1st May 2018, the opposition leader called the people for a general strike on 2nd May 2018. People in the whole country joined in. On the Republic square in Yerevan young and old people celebrated and danced until late at night. When Pashinyan called them back to work and school the next day after, they followed suit.

Photo: Silvia Stöber, 2 May 2018, Republic Square Yerevan

Right:

Green spaces and old houses fell victim to a construction boom. After the beginning of the financial crisis in September 2008 the construction of many new buildings was stopped, expensive apartments remained uninhabited.

Photo: Silvia Stöber, 19 September 2010, city centre Yerevan

Besides environmental topics, women's rights and combating violence against women in the very traditional and conservative society of Armenia played an important role for the protest movement. It is a major concern especially for women from the Armenian diaspora, who came to the country of their ancestors to campaign for progress in the society.

Photo: Silvia Stöber, 19 September 2010, city centre Yerevan

Again and again spontaneous protest actions evolved which attracted hundreds of people to take part, for example in summer 2012. Back then the bodyguards of the oligarch and lawmaker of the ruling party, Ruben Hayrapetian, beat up military personnel so brutally that one of them died later in hospital. For several days people gathered for protest actions, also in front of the parliament building when an European Union delegation visited Yerevan. The demonstrators demanded Hayrapetian's resignation as a lawmaker, which he eventually capitulated to.

Photo: Silvia Stöber, 4 July 2012, Marshal Bagramyan Avenue, parliament building, Yerevan

During the Velvet Revolution in 2018 the activists used their experience from their peaceful protest actions in previous years. They occupied, for example, pedestrian crossings and thereby blocked the whole city centre on several days in April and May. When the police arrived they changed places. Unlike the Maidan activists in Ukraine in 2013–2014 or the students in Peking in 1989 they did not erect protest camps. This allowed them to remain flexible and not provide a target for the security forces.

Photo: Silvia Stöber, 29th April 2018, city centre Yerevan

In Nikol Pashinyan, the activists found a credible leader, with whom many people fell in line. In this picture he is seen during a march across Yerevan on 29 April 2018.
Photo: Silvia Stöber, 29 April 2018, Yerevan

Right:
As fast as the slogan #rejectsersh demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sersh Sargsyan and the ruling party spread, t-shirts picturing Pashinyan were printed and available.
Photo: Silvia Stöber, 29 April 2018, city centre Yerevan

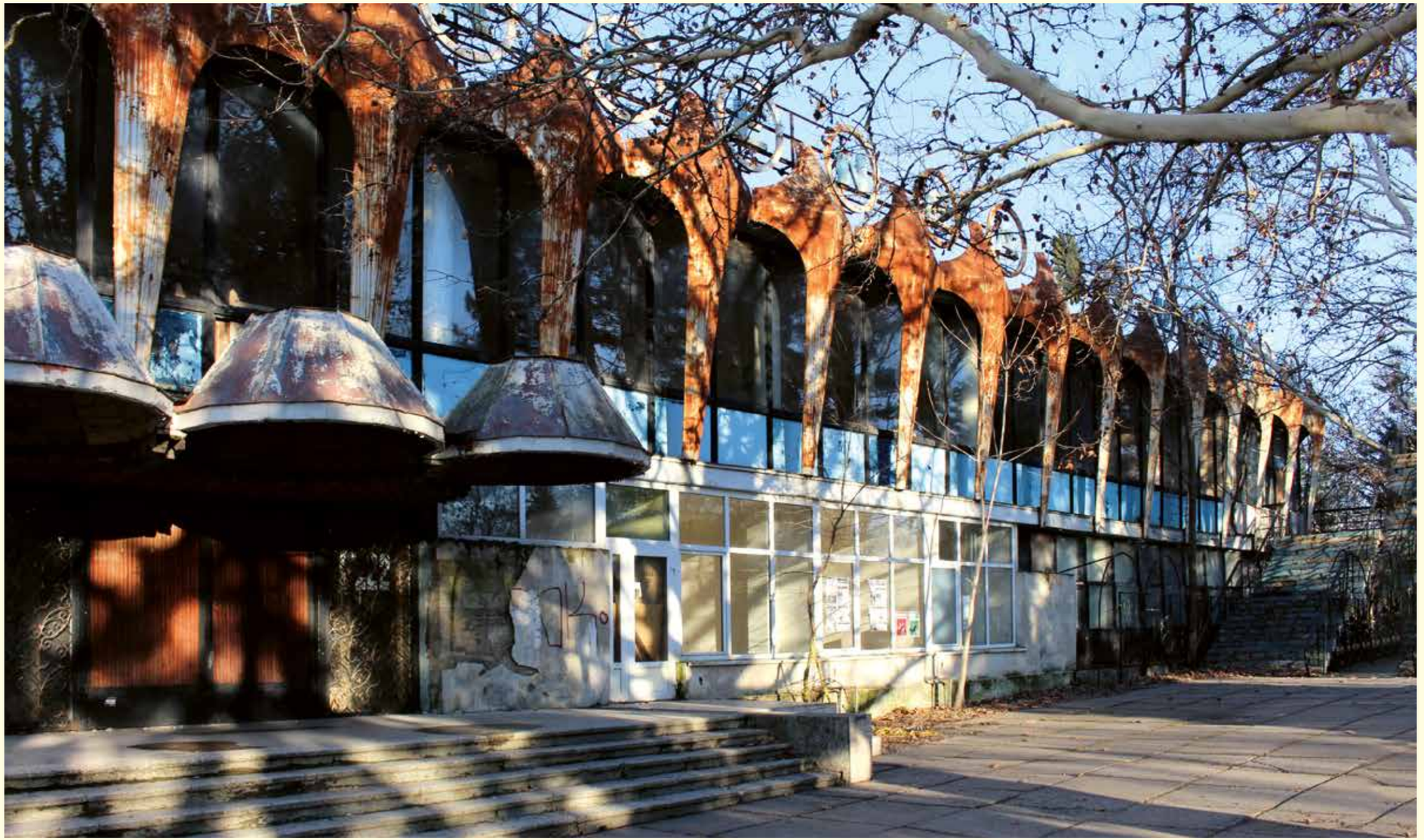
After Pashinyan was eventually elected as prime minister and a new government in power the then in-opposition Republicans challenged the protest movement once more. On 2 October 2018 the deputies from the Republican party tried to push through legislative changes in the parliament in order to delay the snap elections which were demanded by Pashinyan and the people. Once again Pashinyan called the people via Facebook to join the protest. Within one hour thousands of people showed up at the parliament building. They hold out until Pashinyan had finished negotiations with the Republicans and spoke to them outside the building. Finally in December 2018 snap elections were hold. Pashinyans alliance won the absolute majority and took over the government.

Photo: Silvia Stöber, 2 October 2018, parliament building and park Yerevan

Photo Report from

CHISINAU

Nadja Douglas



Occupy Guguță is one of the most recent grassroots level movements that emerged in Moldova. Guguță is a Moldovan fairy tale figure to which during Soviet times a café in the central park of Chișinău, named Ștefan cel Mare Park today, was dedicated. The building of the café has been abandoned for many years. In 2018, the city municipality decided to sell the property to an investor that announced plans to build a business centre on that spot. Many people who still have nostalgic memories linked to the café were upset and several young activists therefore decided to occupy the premises in front of the building to protest against these measures.

Photo: Nadja Douglas, Ștefan cel Mare Park, 26 February 2019

Pages 178–179:
The movement Occupy Guguță became more active in 2019 and started protesting also on behalf of other groups and issues. Their hashtag #ProtestPermanent started popping up in many urban places of Chișinău. Often their protests assume a situationist artistic character. Here the group organised a public assembly on International Women's Day in front of the opera building in Chisinau.

Photo: Volker Kreidler, 8 March 2019

In 2014, Moldova was wrecked by a huge bank fraud scandal. As a result 1 billion dollars – approximately 12 per cent of Moldovan GDP – disappeared from the national bank system, allegedly instigated by local oligarchs. When the government announced that the cost of returning the 'stolen billion' should be borne by the citizenry, a wave of anti-oligarchic protests occurred that lasted until 2016.

Photo: Nadja Douglas, Chișinău, square in front of the National Assembly, 24 March 2016

Protesters were very vocal in accusing the governing elite and authorities of their connection with the oligarchs. A popular slogan was '*Noi suntem Poporul!*' ('We are the people!').

Photo: Nadja Douglas, Chișinău, square in front of the National Assembly, 24 March 2016

Nevertheless, the protest movement soon split into two different camps, the pro-European consisting of activists of the civic platform 'Dignity and Truth' (which later evolved into a political party) that occupied the square in front of the government building, and the pro-Russian group, supporters of the Socialists and Nasha Partiya ('Our Party') that moved to the square in front of the parliament building.

Photo: Maria Levcenco, Chișinău ,
in front of the government building, 28 October 2015

Right page top:
Also in 2016, thousands of followers of the 'Unirea' movement rallied in Chișinău, calling for Moldova's reunification with Romania. The so-called 'March of Reunion' was meant to mark the 98th anniversary of the unification of Bessarabia with the Kingdom of Romania.

Photo: Nadja Douglas,
Downtown Chișinău, 27 March 2016

Right:
Protests continued in 2017 and the discontent found expression in the adoption of a new electoral law introducing a mixed electoral system, promoted by the Democratic Party and supported by the Socialists. The new electoral system is deemed by the opposition parties to help the ruling coalition to prolong their power. Both, the Venice Commission and the OSCE criticised the initiative as inappropriate for Moldova.

Photo: Donnacha Ó Beacháin,
Downtown Chișinău, 11 June 2017

Activists of Occupy Guguță plan their next activities (in the background the café remains).
Photo: Volker Kreidler, 17 July 2018

In 2019, Occupy Guguță started to engage in politics as well. Prior to the parliamentary elections on 24 February, they handed out flyers and put up posters, asking the electorate 'not to vote for oligarchs'.
Photo: Nadja Douglas, Downtown Chișinău, 25 February 2019

Photo Report from

ALMATY

Asel Yeszhanova

Cities and People: Educational programme of Urban Forum Kazakhstan

We invited urban development specialists from different parts of the world to share their knowledge, experience and inspiration. Events included public lectures, specialised master classes, meetings with local activists and officials and media interviews.

15 public events, 5 separate meetings with artists and city activists and 4 consultations with city administration were held within the City and People programme in 2017–2018 reaching more than 500 people in Almaty and around 300 participants in Astana.

In his photography, Andrew Howard (Better Block, Dallas USA) shared his vision of placemaking and citizen engagement.

Photo: Dastan Zhumagulov, Almaty 2017

Workshops: 'Planning the Urban Environment with the Participation of Children'
From 8 to 10 February 2018 a master class 'Game, Children, City: Planning of Game Spaces in the City with Children' was held in Almaty for representatives of the city administration, construction specialists, architects and initiative groups of citizens. This workshop continues the cooperation between the platform and UNICEF Kazakhstan on the formation of a dialogue in the field of taking into account the interests of children and teenagers in urban planning.
The workshop curators are UNICEF international consultant Darya Utkina (Moscow) and Project for Public Spaces senior specialist Anna Siprikova (New York). Within the confines of the practical part, work was carried out to study a number of locations and to prototype the playground on one of them.
Photographer: Dastan Zhumagulov

8 September 2018 Urban Forum Kazakhstan held its first URBANCAMP. Forum of urban initiatives. During the forum, the experience and achievements of 14 initiatives that emerged and had been implemented in Almaty over the past three years were analysed. Also, the results of the 'Network analysis of city initiatives in Almaty' research were announced. 17 speakers spoke at the event: city activists, researchers and representatives of the city administration.

Asel's Yeszhanova closing speech at the head of Urban Forum Kazakhstan
'Today we have brought an important line under several years of rapid growth of urban activism in Almaty. We have different goals and different ways to achieve them, but we agree on the main thing – we, in general, share the same values of urban development, activism and ethics of interaction with each other. We talked a lot today about lessons, best practices and sustainable work formats. Today we are announcing that Urban Forum Almaty, an initiative that emerged three years ago, is also moving to a new format. Today [is] our first event in the new status as Urban Forum Kazakhstan. For us, this is a new, serious challenge. We would like to broadcast an example of inspiration of how progressively and sustainably we come to large and small urban changes not only in Almaty, but also in other cities of Kazakhstan. How can we coexist, accept each other, respect each other's boundaries and not lose touch with each other? How do we interact and make our cities better, more beautiful, safer, more comfortable [and] more sustainable? What values move and unite us, and what needs to be done in order for us to be together as one united society? We invite you to participate in the study of this topic and come to our events, speak out, interact with the platform of Urban Forum Kazakhstan [and] share your expertise, faith, enthusiasm and energy.'
Photo: Dastan Zhumagulov

Photo Report from

BATUMI

Shota Gujabidze

Demonstration protesting the erection of skyscrapers in Batumi Cape, Europe Square, 10 July 2019

Slogan on the poster:
‘Do Not Keep Destroying My House!’
[*nu ingreva chemi sakhli!*]
Shota Gujabidze

Pages 194–195:
Demonstration protesting the erection of skyscrapers in Batumi Cape, Europe Square, 7 October 2018

Slogan on the poster:
‘Remove the Wall—Let Me See the Sea.’
[*gats’ie k’edeli, zghva damanakhe.*]
Shota Gujabidze

Demonstration protesting the massive erection of buildings in the boulevard, Europe Square, 17 April 2016
Shota Gujabidze

Demonstration protesting the erection of skyscrapers in the boulevard, The Boulevard, 23 April 2011

Slogan on the poster:
‘My First and Last Name Is Batumi.’
[*chemi sakheli da gvari batumia.*]
Shota Gujabidze

Demonstration protesting the massive erection of buildings in the boulevard, Rose Square (a view from the building under construction), 17 January 2016
Shota Gujabidze

Appendix

Acknowledgements

The idea of this book dates back to intriguing events and intense reflections carried out among the co-editors and participants of the workshop ‘Overcoming the Distance: Urban Pioneers in Eastern Europe’ in October 2018 in Berlin organised by Zentrum für Osteuropa und internationale Studien (Centre for East European and International Studies, ZOiS) in cooperation with the Centre for Independent Social Research in Berlin /CISR.e.V.). After the ZOiS workshop and participating at the conference ‘Urban Activism and the Development of Civil Society in the Russian Federation’ in October 2018 hosted by Indiana University Europe Gateway in Berlin (with organiser Regina Smyth), we held a series of working meetings in Berlin and Dresden, where the idea of the collection was further developed. The editors identified a significant gap in the studies of urban activism and protest movements in post-Soviet societies, covering not only capital cities in Russia, but also small cities and peripheral regions in the Caucasus and Eurasia.

Many papers originate from these meetings as well as from the editors’ individual research endeavours and professional networks. Such books always owe their existence to a number of people: The authors of chapters and picture series are the ones who made the core of the book and we are grateful to all of them for their willingness to write, revise and rethink their contributions. But there are also many who do not feature directly in the book. We would like to forward our special thanks to the participants in discussions of this book, including Tatiana Golova, Elena Stein, Gwendolyn Sasse, Christian Schaich and Stefanie Orphal. Financial support for the book project was generously provided by Zentrum für Osteuropa und internationale Studien, by the Volkswagen Foundation project grant TRIPAR ‘Shifting Paradigms – Towards Participatory and Effective Planning in Germany, Russia and Ukraine’ and by CISR e.V. We owe thanks to our assistants from RWTH Aachen, Janina Marie Nieper, Richard Schmidt and Giorgi Tadumadze from ZOIS as well as to our excellent language editor Matthew Blackburn.

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Nazaket Azimli has a master's degree in International Political Economy from King's College London. Currently, she is a researcher focusing on topics of collective action, housing, informal settlements and urban sustainability. Nazaket is also a founder of the feminist platform Femiskop, that aims to create feminist content in local languages via mediums such as research-based articles, podcasts and visual arts.

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Carola S. Neugebauer studied landscape architecture and urban design in Germany and France. She is Associate Professor at the RWTH Aachen University. Taking up an interdisciplinary and comparative stance on cities, her research has focused on urban transformations, planning and cultural heritage in Central Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space. Her recent publications are the edited volume *Post-Socialist Urban Infrastructures* (2019, Routledge, together with T. Tuvikene and W. Sgibnev) and the theme issue 'Designing transformation – post-mining experiences in Europe' (2019, Magazine of World Architecture, together with C. Reicher and A. Weber).

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Asel Yeszhanova is a practising architect and something of a cultural activist. She has curated exhibitions and events on themes as diverse as Stalin's repressions, skating culture and labour migration. In 2015 she launched Urban Forum Almaty, an independent platform for the discussion of urban issues in Almaty. Today she is a co-founder of the non-profit organisation Urban Forum Kazakhstan that aims at fostering city-level dialogue on inclusive and resilient urban development in Kazakhstan.

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