

Civic Activism as a Novel Component of Armenian Civil Society



Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan
Valentina Gevorgyan

Yerevan 2016



AN INITIATIVE OF GEBERT RÜF STIFTUNG IN COOPERATION
WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF FRIBOURG

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Authors:

Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan

Valentina Gevorgyan

Contributing team:

Tatevik Badalyan

Armine Bagiyan

Nvard Grigoryan

Nina Kankanyan

Ani Kojoyan

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The present study was conducted with the support of the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN). ASCN is a programme aimed at promoting the social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus (primarily Georgia and Armenia). Its different activities foster the emergence of a new generation of talented scholars. Promising junior researchers receive support through research projects, capacity-building training and scholarships. The programme emphasizes the advancement of individuals who, thanks to their ASCN experience, become better integrated in international academic networks. The ASCN programme is coordinated and operated by the Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). It was initiated and is supported by Gebert Rűf Stiftung.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent opinions of Gebert Rűf Stiftung and the University of Fribourg.

Acknowledgements

This manuscript is a product of a two-year study conducted in Armenia. The theoretical evolution of this study began in 2012 when the team took the lead to research the Armenian civil society. The findings produced in this manuscript are considered as a follow-up to the first study, and spread a larger view on the societal developments involving various civil society actors, with the main ones being civic activist campaigns.

The funding to conduct this research was generously provided by ASCN. We are very grateful to ASCN for their support and promotion of academic work.

We would like to particularly thank our mentor Simone Baglioni, whose leadership and advice have accompanied the team members during the entire study process. We are also grateful to our Alma Mater, the American University of Armenia, and in particular to the Political Science and International Affairs department which hosts the Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis. Thanks to the support, encouragement, very conducive academic atmosphere and superb infrastructure of the institution our work has been all the more enjoyable and productive.

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of dozens of study participants from Yerevan and other Armenian cities and areas who enthusiastically joined the discussions and shared with us their experiences. We would also like to also acknowledge contributions of our research team members to this study: without their dedicated work none of this would have been possible. Many Armenian and international scholars and practitioners helped us sharpen our thinking through numerous discussions at workshops and conferences. Dr. Paturyan also owes a debt of gratitude to graduate students whose questions and discussions helped her engage more thoroughly with the topic. While the wealth of information contained in this manuscript is a co-production of various generous contributors, the responsibility for all errors in the book remains authors' alone.

It has been a long and an insightful journey, the results of which we share with the readers and the interested community, who we hope will benefit from this work.

October 2016

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List of Abbreviations

ARMedia	Alternative Resources in Media (survey)
CB	Caucasus Barometer (survey)
CSI	Civil Society Index
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Centers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RA	Republic of Armenia
TIAC	Transparency International Anticorruption Center
TCPA	Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis
WVS	World Values Survey

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Introduction

There is an inherent irony in the scholarship on post-communist civil society. The concept of civil society was popularised in the late 1980s, referring to social movements that challenged Eastern European communist regimes (Bernhard 1996; Cohen and Arato 1994; Geremek 1996a). After the collapse of communism, those social movements, which were initially depicted as THE civil society, lost momentum; Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) came to replace them. International donors rushed in to support the budding post-communist civil society (which they equated with NGOs) because it was often believed to be one of the cornerstones of a young democracy. Yet, this “NGO-ised” civil society did not meet these high expectations. A decade into the post-communist period, it became a target of criticism: diagnosed as “weak” and shunned by the broader public (Howard 2003). Now, two decades into the post-communist period, spontaneous social organisation is re-emerging and reclaiming its place in the civil society arena.

Armenia exemplifies these phases of the post-communist development of civil society. It witnessed dramatic mass mobilisation in the late 1980s, an equally dramatic public withdrawal in mid-1990s, paralleled by artificial growth in the NGO sector, and, recently, the rise of spontaneous activism. Ten years ago, civil society in Armenia mainly meant NGOs; this is no longer the case. Beginning in 2007, a new actor entered the stage: youth-driven, social media-powered, issue-specific civic activism is a new form of protest and participation. The emergence of this novel component of civil society changes the internal dynamics in the field of civil society, producing new patterns of operation, framing, networking and mobilising. NGOs and civic initiatives have distinct modes of functioning, strengths and weaknesses. There is cooperation but also tensions between the ‘old’ NGO sector and the ‘new’ civic activism. Civic activism is an important but under-researched element of Armenian civil society; it has a complex relationship with older, more institutionalised elements such as NGOs.

The research project discussed in this publication examines patterns of interaction among and mutual perceptions of NGOs and civic activists, placing these two actors into a broader perspective of Armenian political culture of participation and (mis)trust. The novelty of the study is that it combines NGO- and social-movement-oriented approaches to civil society. The study also contributes to the scholarly literature on social movements of the 21st century and their use of social media. In our study, we also sought to be mindful of the gender aspect of the new Armenian civic activism and the overall political culture of participation. We highlight the gender dimension of our findings throughout the narrative.

A note of caution is in order here. While we use the social movement literature as part of our theoretical framework and consider the concepts, developed within that literature, useful for interpreting the Armenian reality, we do not claim that civic initiatives are social movements. Whether they are is a highly debatable question that is not purely academic but also has a normative component to it. Some of the activists we interviewed made it clear they do not think their activities constitute a movement and should not be called a movement. We would like to remain respectful of the people whose actions and opinions constitute the core of our study; hence we use the term ‘civic initiatives’, which is a widely used, uncontroversial self-description with which the activists have no problem identifying.

The key tasks of the project, as discussed in this publication, are to map NGOs’ and activists’ mutual perceptions, identify successful cooperation strategies and sources of tension, and explore the overall political culture of participation and (mis)trust of the broader public and how that affects civil society. The aim of the study is to answer the following research questions:

RQ.1: How do NGOs and activists perceive one another?

RQ.2: How do NGOs and activists interact?

RQ.3: How are NGOs and activists influenced by the overall political culture in the country?

To do so, we employ a mixed-methods approach, combining primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data. In mapping the overall picture of civic activism in Armenia and its interactions with the NGO sector and the broader public, we rely on statistical analysis of secondary data, case studies of social mobilisation, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with key participants in civic activism campaigns in Armenia.

The focus of our study is on the individual, rather than organisational/structural, level. Although NGOs as players do appear in our discussion, the emphasis is on individual values, opinions, attitudes and actions, rather than on organisations, structures or groups acting as units.

The manuscript introduces the overall theoretical framework and provides general information on Armenian civil society in the first two chapters, followed by the Methodology chapter. Chapter IV uses secondary data from public opinion surveys to describe the political culture of participation and protest in Armenia as an important context in which Armenian civil society functions. We pay special attention to media use, particularly social media. There is considerable discussion of the importance of Facebook and other similar networking sites for activism. We believe that it is important to have a realistic understanding of the extent and nature of Facebook use in Armenia to ‘calibrate’ those discussions to the Armenian reality. Chapter V presents, in detail, the five cases of civic activism campaigns, providing a ‘thick description’ of each case and systematically highlighting some comparable characteristics, such as leadership, scope, the gender aspect, and social network use. Chapter IV serves as the bridge between the case studies and qualitative data analysis, drawing on both a systematic comparison of cases and relevant insights from qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with various stakeholders. The rest of the manuscript presents various aspects of the rich qualitative data we collected during the project. In the conclusion, we offer some of our summarising remarks

regarding the research questions, the overall assessment of Armenian civil society and some final observations on the applicability of our theoretical framework.

I. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study primarily concerns overlaps and elusive borders. In our study, we examine both organised and less-organised elements of civil society (the NGOs and the activists). Hence, the theoretical framework borrows from two distinct and extensive schools of thought: civil society (understood primarily as voluntary associations) and social movements. The overlap between these two scholarly traditions is rarely explored, and the border is indeed blurry. Another blurry border we explore in our work is the elusive distinction between civic and political activism. While the protagonists of our study often position themselves as non-political actors, the repertoires they employ are often those of non-conventional political participation. The social issues they seek to address are also often embedded in politics. Thus, the theoretical framework presented in this chapter is broad (sometimes at the expense of depth) and might even appear patchy at times, as we are struggling to bring together various strands of literature. We begin by introducing the concept of civil society and its connection to democracy on the one hand and the literature on social movements on the other hand. We then discuss civic and political activism as forms of actions that manifest the existence of civil society or created the basis on which social movements can be formed. We touch upon the relationship between civic and political activism and youth engagement in those activities. We conclude with a discussion of the role of mass media (traditional and newly developing social media) in shaping civic activism, the civil society sphere and social movements' potential and repertoire of actions.

Civil society, generally defined as a sphere of social activities and organisations outside the state, the market and the private sphere that is based on principles of voluntarism, pluralism and tolerance (Anheier 2004; Diamond 1999; Linz and Stepan 1997; Salamon, Sokolowski, and List 2003), is often considered by scholars of democratisation as an element that facilitates the transition to democracy (Geremek 1996b; Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005), strengthens democratic consolidation (Carroll and Carroll 2004; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994; Tusalem 2007) and improves various qualities of established democracies (Dekker, Koopmans, and van den Broek 1997; Moyser and Parry 1997). Involvement in voluntary organisations contributes to the development of civic skills (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) and is associated with higher levels of political activism and generalised social trust (Dekker and van den Broek 2005; Howard and Gilbert 2008).

Interest in civil society organisations as promoters of democracy can be dated back to Alexis de Tocqueville (2000 [1864]), who hypothesised that associations are “schools of democracy” where people develop habits of cooperation and public-spiritedness. Almond and Verba (1963) explored the link between voluntary associations and political culture and

demonstrated that voluntary associations, among other institutions, shaped participants' civic skills and attitudes. Since then, there have been numerous studies of the various roles that associations play in democratic (Fung 2003; Skocpol 1999; Warren 2001) and not-so-democratic (Antlöv, Brinkerhoff, and Rapp 2010; Beissinger 2005; Geremek 1996b; Hashemi 1996) societies.

Civil society studies often focus on organisations, but there are other players in the civil society 'arena'. Not all civil society activities are channelled through formal institutions, nor do they all take conventional forms. Social movements are also a component of civil society, although their "contentious nature" and often unconventional repertoire of action make them a specific object of research in an ad hoc scientific literature (Della Porta and Diani 1999; Kriesi 1995; Tarrow 1994; Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

Although studies of civil society and studies of social movements have generally been advanced through separate schools within social science, there clearly is an area of overlap. Social movements can be seen as an "integral component" of civil society, or vice versa, the vibrant associational life of civil society can be seen as a part of "broader social movement dynamics" (Della Porta and Diani 2011, 69).

In our study, we examine the interactions (and sometimes elusive borders) between different forms of associational life within contemporary Armenian civil society. Following a framework proposed by Edwards (2013), we examine the "ecosystem" of Armenian civil society, in which two of its many elements, NGOs and mini-social movements (in the form of civic activist groups), function and interact with one another.

1.1. Civic Activism

The notions of civic activism, civic engagement and civic participation are closely interlinked with the concept of civil society. Specifically, citizen participation in civic activities and events can be regarded as an important feature of a well-functioning state because civic actions make it possible for citizens to achieve common goals in efficient and effective ways (Bellah et al. 2007; Scheufele and Shah 2000).

Some authors discuss civic activism as an element of the broader civic and political culture of a given society. The seminal work in this field is that of Almond and Verba (1963). The authors define the concept of "civic culture" as combination of participatory and trustful attitudes towards the state. This cultural approach is also employed by Inglehart (1997), who links increased citizen participation in mass public activities with the growth of post-modernist values, highlighting that "people power has become an unprecedentedly important factor in politics" (Inglehart 1997, 212).

In contrast to the above-mentioned authors, Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001) use a structural approach to analyse the levels and types of civic engagement in various countries, distinguishing among liberal, non-liberal, corporate and non-corporate states. The authors conclude that polity characteristics strongly influence not only the levels but also the types of

civic activism; liberal states enable their citizens to be strong agents in policy-making processes and actual implementation.

Scholars have examined the links between civic activism and social capital, which is often considered one of the most important features of a well-functioning democracy (Putnam 2000; Stolle 1998). Noting that “The norms and networks of civic engagement ... powerfully affect the performance of representative government”, Putnam (1995, 5) connects the decline of American citizens’ involvement in civic activities and voluntary associations with the decline of social capital, defined as the “features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995, 2; Putnam 2000). Stolle (1998) analyses the correlation between trust and the involvement of German and Swedish citizens in voluntary organisations. Noting that those associations that emphasise diversity and have a diverse membership attract more trusting people, the study highlights selection bias in general: citizens joining voluntary associations are generally more trustful than people who do not do so (Stolle and Hooghe 2004; Stolle 1998).

Uslaner and Brown (2005) also note the strong relationship between trust and civic participation. However, the authors highlight the role of economic inequality, noting that wealthy and more educated people are more engaged in civic activities. Alex-Assensoh (2006) also explains differences in levels of civic participation among various groups by different levels of education and income. The author emphasises the importance of civic education, which should ideally start in school. Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry (1996) also note that increased levels of education increase citizen participation in political and public activities. Noting that civic participation is the cornerstone of democracy, Callahan (2007) argues that civic participation is not representative of society at large since doing so requires systematic and regular knowledge. The acquisition of the necessary knowledge requires time and other resources that many people simply do not have. In the United States, immigrants, the poor and less educated people are not generally engaged in civic activities (Alex-Assensoh 2005). Based on similar arguments, one of the recommendations of Martinson and Minkler (2006) is that governments should economically support those low-income individuals who want to engage in civic activities and volunteering.

A number of authors analyse the reciprocal relationship between civic activism and volunteerism. Flanagan (2004) examines the notion and practical aspects of volunteerism in the context of political socialisation and civic activism. The author analyses volunteerism among the youth, noting that the characteristics that are necessary for development of a democratic citizen are shaped during voluntary extracurricular activities. Similarly, Wilson and Musick (1997) note that volunteering improves peoples’ civic skills, making their later civic and political participation more efficient.

Verba (1967) analyzes democratic participation, noting that people’s participation is shaped and stimulated through certain channels and structures. These include participation in the activities of NGOs and voluntary associations. Most of the channels that the author cites embrace volunteerism. NGOs, and the citizens involved in them, make efforts to influence policies. Thus, volunteerism is linked to political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Analysing

volunteering by Swedish citizens, Teorell (2003) notes that volunteerism positively affects peoples' civic attitudes and political behaviour.

Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) question the aforementioned arguments of a positive impact of volunteering and civic activism on political participation. Based on empirical data, they insist that civic activism at any age or of any type does not necessarily entail broader and more competent political participation. They argue that volunteering citizens generally join homogenous groups, which often take the form of community entertainment and have little effect on the quality of democracy (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). Similarly, noting that in essence voluntary organisations should have an important influence on democracy, Dekker and Uslaner (2003) note that many of those organisations are not based on democratic values and are not democratically structured. Volunteering and civic engagement are closely related to the concept of social trust. However, social trust among those citizens who are civically active is not related to higher levels of political trust (Newton 2001, 20). Moreover, interest in politics has relatively weak links with civic activism (Scheufele and Shah 2000, 200)

1.1.1. Civic Activism and Political Activism

Although civic activism and political activism are often intertwined, it is important to discuss some distinctions between the two.

Political engagement refers to actions intended to influence government either directly or indirectly (through voting, for example). Political party membership, campaign work, participation in protests, contacting public officials and affiliation with political organisations are regarded as political activism. Non-political activism is usually defined as membership in an organisation that does not have a political character. Non-political activism can be divided into two specific types: secular and religious activism (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). It often takes the form of volunteering, either for groups and organisations or spontaneously, for example for a cause or the community. Volunteering, either formal or informal, is a vital activity that helps sustain the social fabric, hence contributing to the vitality of civil society or potentially strengthening what Tilly and Tarrow (2007) describe as the “social movement base”, i.e., the organisations, networks, traditions and solidarities that help start or sustain a social movement.

The forms and types of civic activism vary from country to country. For instance, in the United States, religious activities prevail over other forms of non-political engagement, whereas in Germany, the citizens are mostly engaged in social movements and voluntary associations that specifically address social issues (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001).

1.1.2. Youth Engagement

Although many studies provide general overviews of citizen participation and its types, there are studies that distinguish the levels of participation among different age groups. Highlighting the important effect of citizen participation, which substantially affects the quality of democracy, Zukin, Keeter et al. (2006) compare the level and patterns of political versus civic activism. The authors note that younger citizens are less active in political participation, whereas they exhibit high levels of engagement in civic activities. Similarly, another multidisciplinary study on civic

activism reiterates that young people have “repeatedly demonstrated an enormous capacity for civic leadership and participation” (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, and Flanagan 2010, 2). The outstanding examples cited by the authors are widespread activities of young citizens of Tunisia and Egypt. Their role is highlighted in the mobilisation of wide circles of the population seeking to change the political and cultural arenas of their respective countries (Sherrod, Torney-Purta & Flanagan 2010). Moreover, engagement in voluntary associations or civic activities at a young age results in a higher subsequent level of political activism. Specifically, people, mainly adults, are more likely to be politically active if they were previously actively engaged in civic activities (McFarland and Thomas 2006; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996).

1.2. Traditional Mass Media and the Rise of Social Media: Impact on Activism

“...Any radical change in our ability to communicate with one another changes society.” (Shirky 2008, 106). With the rapid development of modern communication technologies, online public participation has emerged as a new and increasingly important area of research. The Internet has made people more powerful, adding to their capacity to participate. Social media has developed into a social platform for discussing ideas, organising events, signing petitions and engaging in other interactions. Since the Arab Spring, the role of social media in civic activism and in social movements has become a hotly debated topic worldwide. This section presents a review of the literature on the linkage between public participation and Internet and social media usage.

First, it is important to recognise that the impact of communication media on activism is not a new field of research. In his famous work on the structural transformation of the public sphere, Jurgen Habermas (1962) argued that the press, as a means of communication, played an important role in Europe’s democratisation process. The printing press helped create a space for civic discourse among those who were politically engaged and interested in public activities (Habermas 1991).

Various studies highlight the mobilising role of mass communication media when discussing civic activism. Hoffman and Thomson (2009) emphasise the essential role of TV shows in determining the levels of civic participation, especially by young citizens. In this regard, the content of media should be differentiated: the impact of informational media resources has a positive effect on civic participation, whereas other forms of media such as TV and movies have largely negative effects (Wellman et al. 2001). Furthermore, Uslander and Brown (2005) note that people who spend more time watching television are less likely to be engaged in civic activities.

The rapid spread of the Internet adds a new component to the existing scholarly tradition of research on the role of communication channels and activism. The Internet and new social media add to our understanding of the importance of “mobilising structures” (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996) in explaining social movement dynamics. The new developments are also discussed in the civil society literature. Shirky (2011) argues that the strength of online

communication tools lies mainly in the support they provide for civil society and the public sphere.

Some authors approach social networks as a tool for change, especially political change (Raouf et al. 2013), and for empowering ordinary people worldwide to have a public voice (Kirkpatrick 2011). The Internet has a positive effect on civic engagement, and social media is able to facilitate collective action (Yang 2003). Gil de Zuniga, Jung and Valenzuela (2012) analyse the impact of social media networks on civic participation, demonstrating that the use of social networks positively affects civic participation, defined as voluntary activities for non-political organisation, involvement in charitable events and other activities that derive from social values. Another study identifies a relationship between Facebook usage and social capital, noting that social media improves connections among people who benefit from academic, community or professional networks (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007). Valenzuela, Park and Kee (2009) argue that Facebook usage promotes peoples' engagement in civic activities and increases social trust, life satisfaction, self-esteem and even political participation. Some studies demonstrate that social networking increases the likelihood of citizen engagement in politics (Lake and Huckfeldt 1998) and impacts organisational membership and protest attendance (Schwarz 2012). Overall, the importance of the Internet has been framed as helping to build 'bridging' capital (Kavanaugh et al. 2005) that, in turn, helps to consolidate cooperative mutual engagement and promotes collective action (Putnam 2000).

The Arab Spring highlighted the importance of social media and attracted researchers' attention to Facebook and Twitter (Breuer 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011). Many of these authors argue that the social media not only facilitated the organisation of movements by reducing the costs of organising them but also created a collective national identity and created opportunities for cross-class cooperation. Some even contend that nearly half of the protesters participated because of the coverage of the protests on Facebook and Twitter (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011). The blogosphere is also cited as occupying an important place within Egyptian media (Hirschkind 2011).

Although Facebook and Twitter have attracted the lion's share of attention devoted to social networking sites, the Blackberry Messenger Service is also cited as facilitating successful mobilisation in London (see Bell 2011 and Halliday 2011).

Other researchers, however, do not consider social media to be a significant contributor to social movements' success, arguing that activists owe their achievements mostly to the traditional means of protests; social media is effective at framing a protest, not in organising one (Metwalli 2010; Theocharis 2011; Tusa 2013; Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman 2012). Some authors suggest that while the use of communication channels is on the rise, such use narrows people's mobilising potential and makes them lose contact with their social environment (Nie and Erbring 2000; Van Laer 2010). Revealing some of the negative consequences of Internet proliferation, several authors highlight that social media tools can be beneficial to governments and intelligence agencies and be used by authoritarian regimes for propaganda

purposes, civic activism, and sometimes even to misinterpret reality (Aday et al. 2010; Dewey et al. 2012; Greer and McLaughlin 2010; Morozov 2012).

Thus, the debate on the impact of the new social media on civil society's mobilising potential and on activism is far from resolved. New social media adds to our repertoire of collective action and enhances our communicative capacity. It could serve as a mobilising structure for social movements and civic action. However, as with any communication channel, it can also be used for misinformation, to distract attention, and for entertainment instead of tough questions; it can generate illusory rather than actual participation.

II. Armenian Civil Society: Background

Armenia is a former Soviet Republic in the South Caucasus and has been independent since 1991. A tiny landlocked country with an ethnically homogenous population of approximately three million people, Armenia experienced considerable difficulty while re-establishing itself as a nation-state. A rapidly collapsing economy, a devastating earthquake, and a conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan, which escalated into a full-scale war, plunged Armenia into what is now referred to as the “dark and cold” years of the mid-1990s. Given these conditions, people were not concerned about anything but their daily bread. Although the NGO sector expanded thanks to generous international aid, activism was barely visible. As the situation stabilised in the late 1990s and gradually improved during the first decade of the 21st century, both the public at large and the civil society sector in particular slowly recovered some energy and interest in the public domain. The “ecosystem” of civil society became richer, with new types of entities appearing, as described in greater detail below. The scars of communism are fading, the wreckage of the transition period is gradually being overcome, and a new system is being shaped, although very slowly.

Armenian civil society after 20 years of post-communist development is a curious mix of successes and failures. An overall assessment of Armenian civil society (USAID 2015) depicts it as partially developed, with no major upward or downward trends (Habdank-Kolaczowska, Machalek, and Walker 2012; USAID 2015). It has a relatively strong level of organisation but low civic engagement and weak impact (L. Hakobyan et al. 2010). The Armenian NGO sector is described as donor driven (Blue and Ghazaryan 2004) to the extent of becoming artificial (Ishkanian 2008). Public trust in NGOs is low (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014a). There have also been studies highlighting positive aspects of Armenian civil society, such as high levels of trust in small rural communities (Babajanian 2008) and high potential for informal volunteering (L. Hakobyan and Tadevosyan 2010).

2.1. The NGO Sector

The NGO sector in contemporary Armenian civil society can be characterised as fairly institutionalised but detached from the broader public. The first part (institutionalisation) is a comparatively new development, while the second part (detachment from the public) has plagued Armenian civil society for almost two decades. This is a typical “weakness” of a post-communist associational political culture (Howard 2003) that remains unchanged in Armenia.

Focusing on the NGOs as main actors of civil society, our previous research shows that in addition to many new NGOs being established in Armenia every year a substantial number of NGOs have accumulated a track record of activities and achieved a reasonable level of financial and organisational viability. For instance, if ten years ago NGOs were characterised as mostly dependent on a ‘strong leader’, who was usually the founder, with only a few NGOs experiencing a leadership transition (Blue, Payton, and Kharatyan 2001), a recent organisational survey conducted by TCPA shows that 75% of NGOs surveyed have undergone at least one change in leadership. A number of other variables (such as internal NGO governing structures, number of staff and volunteers, fundraising activities, and public outreach) suggest that the NGO sector is much more institutionalised and stable than was the case twenty or even ten years ago. Thus, in terms of organisational structures, there clearly is development of civil society (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014b).

However, if these organisations are considered in the broader context of public engagement, the picture is discouraging. Public trust in NGOs is low (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014a) and decreasing: according to Caucasus Barometer, the percentage of those who trust NGOs has remained almost unchanged (from 19% in 2012 to 18% in 2013, which is a change within the margin of error), but the percentage of those who distrust NGOs increased from 28% in 2012 to 36% in 2013. In terms of membership, Armenian civil society still suffers heavily from the post-communist dislike of formal associational life. The most recent World Values Survey data (2011 for Armenia) indicate negligibly low membership in various voluntary associations; such membership has actually declined since 1997, when the previous WVS was conducted in Armenia. Thus, in terms of public attitudes and involvement, there is a striking lack of development, and one could even speak of a slight regression in the most recent years.

In addition to public mistrust and disengagement, the Armenian NGO sector faces a set of problems caused by the rapid, donor-driven initial development of NGOs after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The manifold challenges of regime transitions, accompanied by economic collapse, created the demand for social action, while generous international donor support boosted the supply. This process led to a mushrooming of NGOs heavily dependent on external donors. Ishkanian (2009) describes this process as “genetically engineered civil society.” While this influx of funds helped to establish a vibrant NGO sector, it created the set of constraints that NGOs currently face. If international developmental aid were withdrawn, most NGOs would exhibit questionable organisational sustainability. More important, the legitimacy of civil society organisations to represent local voices is often disputed on the grounds that many NGOs are funded from abroad. Ishkanian (2009, 10) also argues that this overemphasis on NGOs

had a negative impact on the overall diversity of the civil society ecosystem. “... Genetically engineered civil society... began to colonize and squeeze out all indigenous competitors, becoming the dominant type in its environment... Civil society was reduced to professionalised service delivery or advocacy NGOs.”

Joining associations is one element of civic political culture (Almond and Verba 1963). If that element has remained unchanged in Armenia, it is important to broaden the study by exploring other elements of civic culture such as generalised social trust, conventional (voting) and unconventional (demonstrations, petitions, boycotts) forms of participation. This would provide a better understanding of the overall environment in which civil society functions in Armenia and how that environment differs from that of 1997. This task is undertaken in Chapter V of the manuscript.

Civil society is not just NGOs. In the Armenia of the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, civil society was largely equated with NGOs, but this situation is changing. Since circa 2008, we seem to be witnessing some restoration of balance in the civil society ecosystem. Other forms of organisation, particularly spontaneous organisation, have emerged and gradually become more visible, vocal, and prominent in recent years. The next section of this chapter presents the “newcomers” in the civil society arena.

2.2. Civic Initiatives

While NGOs are an important component of civil society, they are by no means the only ‘players’ in the ‘arena’ outside the government, market and private sphere that is civil society (Linz and Stepan 1997). An important new development in the realm of Armenian civil society is the relatively recent rise of a new type of activities and organisational structures called civic initiatives. This term is a self-description used by a variety of issue-oriented, loosely horizontally structured groups of individual activists that unite around a common often very specific cause (such as the prevention of construction in a public park, preservation of a architecturally valuable building set to be demolished, or protests against a new mine under construction). These new forms of civic participation have registered a number of victories since their emergence in 2008 (Ishkanian et al. 2013a) and are now an important and highly visible element of Armenian civil society that must be taken seriously. Five such civic initiatives are discussed in greater detail in this book: two of them being the most recent and impactful examples of social contention. They addressed a pension reform and an increase in electricity prices. Both had a visible impact on the political system and led to a partial revision of government decisions.

With the exception of these two most recent and dramatic campaigns, civic initiatives are usually small in numbers and are often confined to Yerevan, or spearheaded from Yerevan if a regional environmental issue is at stake. The core activists are young educated people; they use social media to organise and spread information regarding their activities.

Activism through civic initiatives is distinct from the “NGO approach” in a number of ways. The differences are discussed in greater detail in this manuscript, but it is worth

mentioning a few key points here to underscore the difference between these two types of civil society actors.

Unlike NGOs, civic activist groups maintain minimal levels of formal organisation. They do not opt for becoming legal entities through state registration procedures. Membership, leadership and decision-making rules are simple and based on unwritten, informal conventions, acceptance and mutual understanding. In this respect, civic initiatives are more akin to social movements than to associations.

Another major difference between NGOs and civic initiatives is the focus of their main activities. While NGOs have mission statements and areas of expertise, these are usually fairly broad. Armenian NGOs often engage in a number of varied projects that loosely connect to their mission; drifting focus areas (often in response to chance changes in donor preferences) is not uncommon. Civic initiatives, by contrast, are mostly very narrowly targeted at one specific issue. They have a clearly defined goal (to preserve one particular park, for example). Once the issue is resolved, the civic initiative in question ceases to exist. Of course, the individual network does not disappear overnight. The same people are likely to take up another campaign in a similar (or a different) field. One often sees the same people as core activists in various campaigns (Bagiyan 2015; Kankanyan 2015).

The third and perhaps most defining difference between NGOs and civic initiatives is that grants are the lifeblood and the modus operandi of NGOs. Most of them do not even consider the possibility of becoming self-sustainable and moving away from grant-earning and implementing cycles. Grants from international development organisations are actively sought and considered prestigious. Civic initiatives, by contrast, explicitly reject foreign funding. They aim at being self-sustaining at any given point in time, undertaking only those activities that they can implement through volunteer commitment and minimal fundraising among members.

Thus, contemporary Armenian civil society is richer than it was ten years ago. Civic initiatives have entered the civil society arena and brought distinct ways of organising and operating. Our research project examines the interplay between the ‘old’ NGO sector and the ‘new’ civic activism, using a range of methods, which are discussed in the next chapter.

III. Methodology

The goal of the research project, described in this manuscript, is to study the interplay between NGOs, as the older elements of Armenian civil society, and civic initiatives led by activists, as the new actors in the civil society arena. The aim of the project is to answer the following research questions:

RQ.1: How do NGOs and activists perceive one another?

RQ.2: How do NGOs and activists interact?

RQ.3: How are NGOs and activists influenced by the overall political culture in the country?

The research project combines quantitative and qualitative data analysis, drawing on existing data, and collects and analyses primary data. The study consists of the following components: secondary data analysis, case studies of civic initiatives, interviews, and focus group discussions with activists, NGO leaders, NGO staff, and representatives of the general public.

3.1. Secondary Data Analysis

In terms of available survey data, this research uses data from the following surveys: the World Values Survey (third wave, 1995-1998, and sixth wave, 2010-2014); the Caucasus Barometer (2008-2013); Alternative Resources in Media 2011 and 2013; and the CIVICUS Civil Society Index survey 2014. All of these surveys were based on nationwide representative samples of adult residents of the RA.¹

The World Values Survey (WVS) is a global research project that includes a broad range of socio-cultural and political topics. The survey is conducted periodically by local survey organisations or scholarly teams in close cooperation with and under the supervision of the WVS Association.² The analysis in this publication is based on data from the third (1995-1998) and the sixth (2010-2014) waves of WVS because these are the only two waves that included Armenia. The specific years that the WVS data were collected in Armenia were 1997 for the third wave and 2011 for the sixth wave.

The Caucasus Barometer (CB) is an annual nationwide representative survey that has been conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centres (CRRC) in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia since 2008. Two nationwide representative surveys conducted by CRRC-Armenia in 2011 and 2013, called Alternative Resources in Media (ARMedia), focus specifically on media consumption patterns and media perceptions.³

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) is a participatory action-research project assessing the state of civil society in countries around the world. The CSI is initiated and implemented by local partner organisations, in partnership with the CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation.⁴ The CSI consists of a number of assessment tools, including a nationwide representative population survey. Counterpart International Armenia was the local implementing partner of the survey. The database was requested directly from Counterpart.

¹ ARMedia included younger respondents aged 15+; the WVS includes respondents aged 17+.

² Further information on the WVS is available at: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>

³ Further information on the CRRC and the CB is available at: <http://www.crrcenters.org>. Information about CRRC-Armenia and the ARMedia study is available at: <http://www.crrc.am>

⁴ Further information is available at: <http://civicus.org/index.php/en/>

3.2. Case Studies

To move from the general political culture and climate into specific settings and realities of civic activism in Armenia, the study employed the case study method, following Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) recommendation of carefully describing an episode of contention and its settings as the pre-requisite of analysis. The aim was to create a detailed 'thick description' of the main actors, strategies, NGO involvement, interaction patterns and use of social media. The case studies also helped to identify key interviewees and focus group participants, as well as provide insights into topics and questions for subsequent discussions.

The case study method was particularly well-suited for our purposes; one of its strengths is that it allows examining a phenomenon in its real life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not very clear (McNabb 2004). Within each case, we examine processes, actors, decisions and organisations.

The following five civic initiatives (in chronological order of the year in which they began) were selected for the case study:

1. Save Teghut Civic Initiative (Teghut hereafter): 2007 – on-going;
2. Stop Changes in Maternity Leave Law (Maternity Leave hereafter): 2010, re-started in 2014;
3. Dem Em (I am against): 2013;
4. Let's Preserve the Afrikyan Club Building (Afrikyan hereafter): 2014;
5. Electric Yerevan: 2015.

In selecting the cases of civic activism in Armenia, we sought to maximise diversity in terms of scope, issues, outcomes and importance for the broader context of civic activism in Armenia. The Teghut case is often considered a landmark: the oldest on-going environmental camping that continues despite failing to achieve its prime objective, as will be described in Chapter V. It is a unique case of persistence in the face of formidable challenges. The Maternity Leave case was selected because it has an explicit gender dimension: one of the important overall elements of the study. It is also an interesting case of an initiative that was re-started as the need arose. Maternity Leave is also a success case. The Afrikyan case exemplifies a short-lived, failed initiative, despite employing a variety of creative techniques. There are certainly lessons to be learned from that initiative. Dem Em was the largest civic initiative (in terms of the number of people involved) that had made the biggest political splash at the outset of our study. It is also a curious case in terms of outcomes: some characterise it as an unprecedented success, while others argue that its achievements are modest and temporary at best. Electric Yerevan occurred six months into the study. It gave us an opportunity to observe, first-hand, the unfolding events. It quickly overshadowed Dem Em both in terms of the number of people involved and political resonance. Not including it would have been a lost opportunity.

Data for each case were collected through the analysis of news reports, documents, publications, previous studies, and information available through social media. The understanding of the cases was further enhanced through interviews and focus group discussions with event participants, as described in the next section. It was a two-way process: collecting

information on the case helped identify key interviewees, who provided additional insights on the cases and additional important contacts. Eventually, the process of soliciting names reached a saturation point: any name provided was already on the list.

Thus, Electric Yerevan is the only case for which an observation method was utilised. Team members spent at least 30 minutes per day on site at various times of the day. They had general guidelines on what to pay attention to during the observation, but the overall observation approach was kept flexible. Team members were encouraged to engage in casual conversations or join groups. Observers took written notes after the visit; the protesters could have perceived taking notes on site as suspicious.

3.3 Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

To explore the issues in greater detail, a qualitative method of interviews and focus group discussions was employed during the research. We conducted ten focus groups: with leaders and members of NGOs (four), civic activists (four), and non-activists as representatives of the general, sceptically oriented public (two). Eight of those took place in Yerevan, one was in Gyumri (the second largest city in Armenia) and one in Kapan: a town in the south with an active NGO and civic activism community focused on environmental issues. One of the activist focus groups was composed of Armenians of Diaspora origin currently living in Armenia, as they seem to be a distinct type of activists. All discussions were organised and moderated by senior researcher. The information on the focus group discussions is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Structure of Focus Group Discussions

	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Location</i>
<i>FG1</i>	NGO leaders and members	Yerevan
<i>FG2</i>	NGO leaders and members	Yerevan
<i>FG3</i>	NGO leaders and members	Yerevan
<i>FG4</i>	NGO leaders and members	Kapan
<i>FG5</i>	Civic activists	Yerevan
<i>FG6</i>	Civic activists	Yerevan
<i>FG7</i>	Civic activists	Gyumri
<i>FG8</i>	Civic activists Diaspora	Yerevan
<i>FG9</i>	Non-activists	Yerevan
<i>FG10</i>	Non-activists	Yerevan

We also conducted a total of 30 semi-structured interviews: 20 interviews with leaders and organisational team members of the case study civic initiatives and ten interviews with leaders of NGOs actively involved in civic initiatives. See Appendixes 1-5 for all the interview and focus group discussion guides. The fieldwork lasted from August 2015 to March 2016.

Focus groups and interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were imported into MAXQDA software. We created an indexing system, taking into consideration both the categories derived from the research questions and themes emerging from the data. The indexes were applied through MAXQDA software, which was further used to enhance the data analysis. See Appendix 6

Appendix 6 Qualitative Data Indexing Scheme for the indexing scheme.

Thus, the study is a mix of methods, intended to capture various, dynamic aspects of contemporary Armenian civil society and placing them in the broader context of political culture. The remainder of the manuscript presents our findings, starting with a general discussion of the overall political culture, focusing particularly on aspects of political participation and information-gathering patterns.

IV. Armenian Public Attitudes and Political Culture: Setting the Stage

Armenian civic and political life has gone through several phases: from the dramatic and unprecedented levels of mobilisation of the late 1980s and early 1990s to widespread cynicism and disengagement around the turn of the century. Some argue that civic and political participation is slowly recovering from a recession, citing the 2008 presidential elections as a sign of relatively successful social mobilisation (albeit an unsuccessful attempt at changing political leadership).

As discussed in Chapter II, the landscape of Armenian civil society also seems to be changing: civic initiatives have been re-energising it since circa 2008. These youth-driven, social media-powered, issue-specific, loosely organised miniature social movements are the new form of protest and political participation, in addition to ‘traditional’ electoral mobilisation. There have been more than 30 such initiatives in Armenia since 2007, with roughly one-quarter of those resulting in a victory for the activists. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent these movements will grow in scope.

The new forms of social participation take place against the general backdrop of Armenian political culture, which suffers from a post-communist syndrome of disengagement and cynicism towards the public sphere. These values and opinions, however, are not static and not necessarily shared by the various socio-economic and demographic groups present in Armenian society. To accurately assess the odds of increased participation in social movements and other forms of non-conventional political participation, a more detailed analysis of the trends and patterns of Armenian political culture is necessary. This chapter examines public opinion survey data (World Values Survey 1997 and 2011, Caucasus Barometer 2008-2013 and other nationwide representative surveys) to examine social and political participation (both actual and potential) among the Armenian population, with a focus on age cohorts, gender differences, and other socio-demographic variables. It also highlights the use of social media by various groups. The aim of the chapter is to place Armenian civic initiatives in the context of the political culture in which they operate.

The chapter examines secondary data on various types of political and civic participation in Armenia and contrasts those data with data on Internet and social media use. The aim is to

explore the overall political culture in which new civic initiatives have to operate and to juxtapose typical characteristics of a social media user and a potential activist to determine the extent to which these two groups overlap.

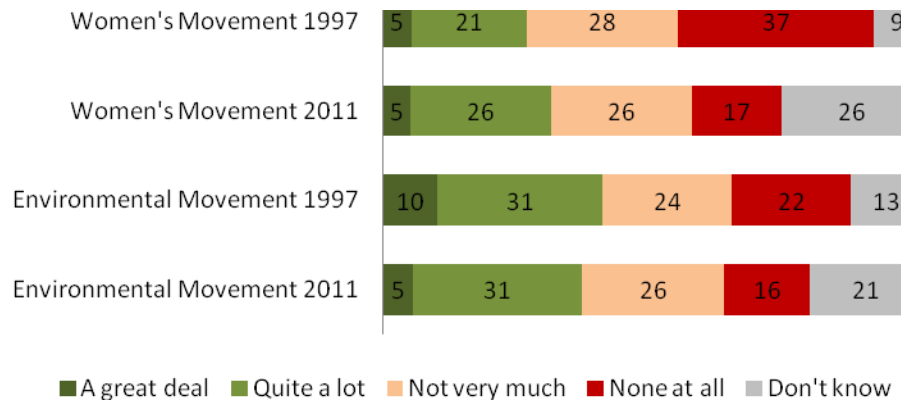
4.1. Descriptive Analysis of the Survey Data

The first part of the analysis presents descriptive data on civic and political activism in Armenia, noting changes over time whenever possible. The purpose is to clarify the overall environment in which civic activism takes place. We assess the overall culture of civic participation by investigating general public perceptions of social movements, membership in various formal and informal groups and organisations, and volunteering. We then discuss political participation because civic activism is very often not the end goal but a tool for bringing change, which is ultimately a political process, often aided by political activism. We examine overall interest in politics and conventional and non-conventional forms of political participation, the latter being the most important since they are often utilised by civic activists. The third part of the descriptive analysis considers the media landscape and particularly the use of social media as a source of information. The purpose is to assess the potential for outreach using social media, which is heavily used by Armenian civic initiatives to mobilise support and inform the public.

4.1.1. Civic Participation and Civic Activism

First, let us consider the overall public attitude towards civic activism. The WVS survey has data on levels of confidence in two types of social movements: the environmental movement and the women's movement. For both of those movements, there are more negative than positive opinions: in 2011, 31% say they have either a 'great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in women's movements, compared with 41% saying either 'not very much' or 'not at all.' For the environmental movement, the percentages of positive vs. negative responses were 36% and 42%, respectively. The good news, however, is that WVS data show a clear increase in confidence in the women's movement: the mean, measured on a scale from 1 ("a great deal") to 4 ("none at all") changed from 3.05 in 1997 to 2.74 in 2011 (note that higher numbers indicate less confidence, due to the way the responses are coded). Judged by the simple measure of the mean level of confidence, the general public's perception of the environmental movement has not improved. Nonetheless, when examining the response categories in greater detail, a slight shift in attitudes is noticeable: fewer people hold strong opinions (either positive or negative), while the percentage of those undecided has increased, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Confidence in social movements (WVS, %)



Membership in various associations in Armenia remains dismally low and has even decreased compared to 1997: 7% of the population was active in at least one organisation in 2011 compared with 17% in 1997. Members of art, music and educational organisations accounted for 1.5% of the population in 2011, and other types of organisations have even lower numbers (see Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014b, 58, for the details based on WVS data). According to a survey conducted within the framework of CIVICUS Civil Society Index Rapid Assessment in Armenia in 2014, 2.4% of the population reported being a member of an informal civic group or a movement. Unfortunately, no earlier data on participation in informal civic groups are available.

Unlike formal membership in associations, some informal types of civic engagement in the community seem to be on the rise in Armenia. Volunteering, particularly informal volunteering has increased in recent years: according to CB data, 31% of the Armenian population reported doing voluntary work in 2013, compared with 22% in 2011.

4.1.2. Political Participation

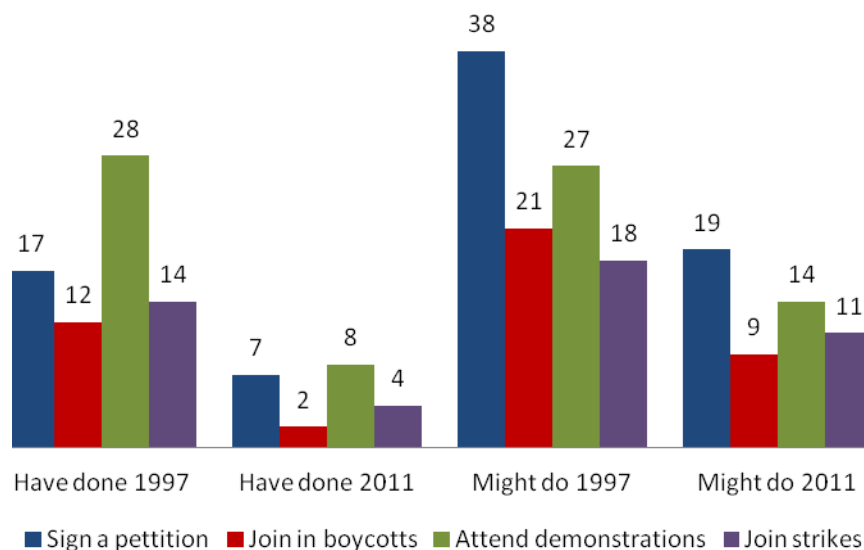
According to WVS data, most Armenians are not interested in politics: 65% said they are either ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ interested while 35% are either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ interested. Moreover, people are currently substantially less interested in politics than they were in the early years of the newly independent RA: in 1997, 13% stated that they are ‘not at all’ interested in politics, while in 2011, the number of those completely disinterested had reached 35%.⁵ While voter turnout remains relatively stable at approximately 61% (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2015), membership in political parties and labour unions remains dismal: 2.1% and 0.6%, respectively, as recorded by WVS.

Non-conventional political participation in Armenia is currently lower than it was in the mid-1990s. For all four types of non-conventional political actions measured in the WVS

⁵ The mean score for this question on a scale from 1 “very interested” to 4 “not at all interested” changed from 2.47 in 1997 to 2.93 in 2011. Note that a higher score indicates lower interest in politics.

(signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending demonstrations and joining strikes),⁶ the percentages of both those who reported having engaged in such actions and those who said they might become so engaged declined from 1997 to 2011, as evident from Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Political activism in Armenia (WVS, %)



However, if we consider a more recent period in greater detail, there is a reason to believe that there might be an increase in non-conventional political participation. According to CB data, the percentage of those who believe people should participate in protest actions has increased over the course of the past few years, from 59% in 2008 to 70% in 2013.

4.1.3. Media Landscape, Use of Social Media

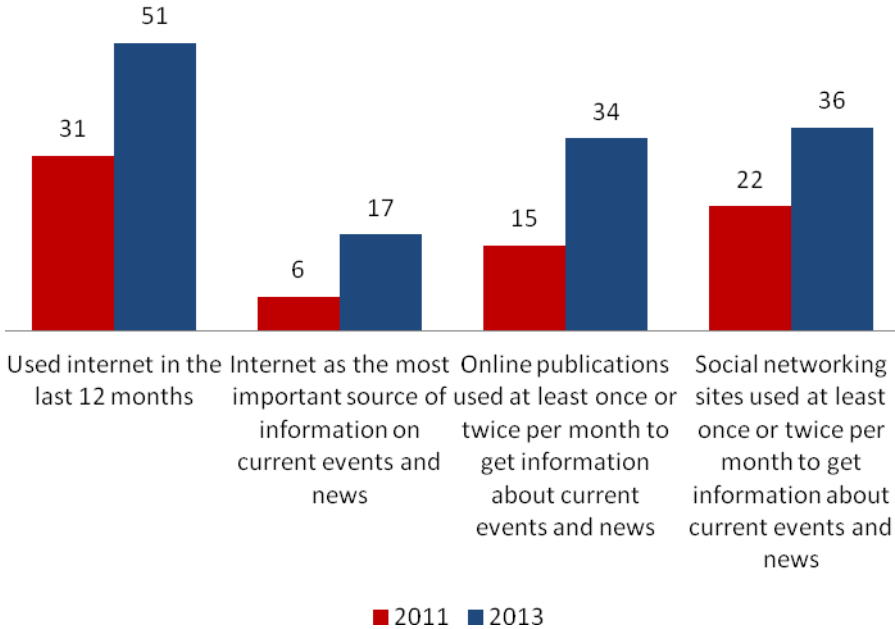
Since civic activism often relies on the Internet and, particularly, on social media to spread information, mobilise support and organise some of its activities, it is important to understand the Armenian online media landscape and its recent trends. ARMedia surveys provide a wealth of data in that respect.

The surveys show that the role of TV as an information source has diminished somewhat: 79% of people in 2013, compared with 90% in 2011, name it “the most important source of information on current events and news.” The importance of the Internet as a source of information has grown, from 6% in 2011 to 17% in 2013. In general, Internet usage has increased, from 31% of respondents reporting that they have “used internet in the last 12 months” to 51% reporting having done so. Online publications are used at least once or twice per month “to get information about current events and news” by 34% of the population in 2013,

⁶ There are minor discrepancies in question wording. In 1997, respondents were asked whether they had ever attended a lawful demonstration, while in 2011, the wording was peaceful demonstration. In 1997, they were asked about “unofficial strikes”, while the word “unofficial” was omitted in 2011.

compared with 15% of the population in 2011. The use of social networking sites for similar purposes increased from 22% in 2011 to 36% in 2013. As Figure 3 below illustrates, the importance of the Internet in general, and social networking sites in particular, has grown. Trust in these alternative sources of information has also increased. On a four-point scale (where one means ‘no trust at all’ and four means ‘trust very much’), online media sources received an average score of 2.63 in 2011 and 2.73 in 2013. Trust in social networking sites has increased slightly: from an average of 2.54 in 2011 to 2.59 in 2013.

Figure 3: Increased importance of the Internet as an information source (ARMedia, %)



Odnoklassniki remains the most popular social networking site (with 17% and 23% of the population using it in 2011 and 2013, respectively), but Facebook is catching up: in 2011, only 3% of the population reported having a page or a public profile, while by 2013, the share had grown to 12%. Among social network users, the percentage of those who use them for sharing political and/or social news increased from 16% in 2011 to 21% in 2013 (3.4% and 7.5% of the general population, respectively).

4.2. Inferential Analysis: Are Online Media Users the Same as Activists?

Descriptive data analysis in the previous section helps us understand the overall context in which civic initiatives operate in contemporary Armenia and provides some comparison with the recent and more remote past. This section examines some variables in greater detail. In particular, our goal was to understand who is more likely to partake in activism and to what extent potential

activists are being targeted through social network information campaigns. Unfortunately, we have no single database that would contain information on both the use of social media and activism, and hence, we are unable to directly compare these two elements. ARMedia has data on the use of social networks but no data on activism, while the WVS has data on activism but not on use of social networks. To enable us to combine these two types of information, we operationalise this information using standard variables that can be compared. We use basic socio-demographic variables, age, gender, education and income, to depict a ‘typical Armenian social network user’ and compare that socio-demographic portrait with a ‘typical Armenian political activist’ to determine whether there is a match between these two groups. Settlement type is included in the analysis of Internet use but not in the analysis of activism because the WVS does not have a comparable variable.

4.2.1. On the Receiving End of Online Information

As we demonstrated in the descriptive section of this chapter, Internet usage is on the rise in Armenia. Assuming that civic initiatives rely on the Internet, and particularly on social media, to spread information about their activities and mobilise support, who are the people on the receiving end of civic initiatives’ information campaigns? To understand this, we ran a number of statistical tests with the standard socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, income and settlement type) and four of the variables described above: Internet use, trust in online information sources (online publications and social networking sites in particular), and frequency of social networking site use to gain information about current events and news. We conducted tests for the years 2011 and 2013. Unless specified otherwise, we report the results of statistical tests for the year 2013 only, while discussing a pattern that applies to both years, to avoid burdening the chapter with too many numbers.

Age: Younger people use the Internet more. The average age of those who report using the Internet in the past 12 months is 38, compared with an average age of 56 for non-users for the year 2013; this difference is statistically significant.⁷ Nearly one-third (27%) of those who reported having used the Internet in the past 12 months are between 25 and 34 years old; another 23% come from the 15-24 age cohort. Thus, people up to 34 years old account for half of the Internet users for the year 2013. There is a statistically significant correlation between age on the one hand and trust in both online media⁸ and social networks⁹ as sources of information on the other: younger people are more trustful. The pattern is very clear and runs steadily through age cohorts, as depicted in Figure 4. Younger people are also more frequent users of social networking sites as a source of information about current events.¹⁰

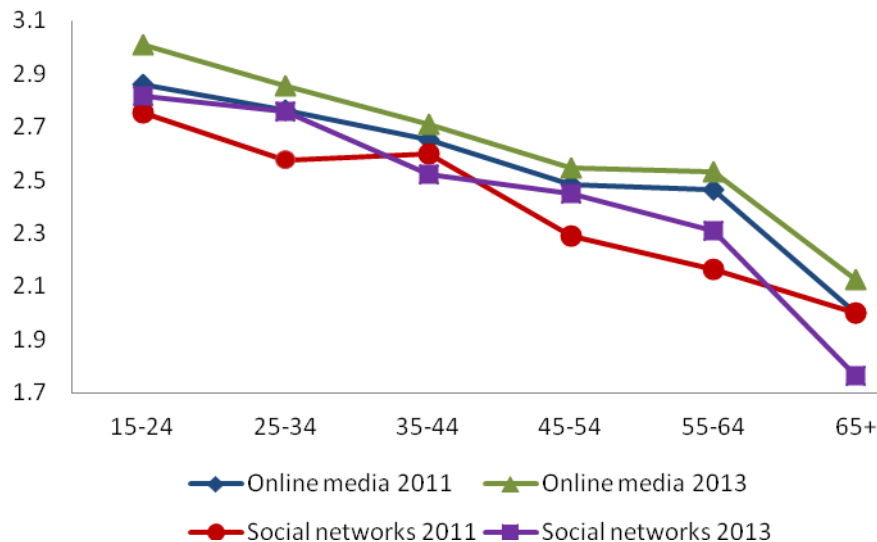
⁷ T-test: $t(1397) = -20.997$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

⁸ Pearson’s correlation: $r = -0.274$, $N = 677$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

⁹ Pearson’s correlation: $r = -0.283$, $N = 647$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

¹⁰ Pearson’s correlation: $r = 0.527$, $N = 1383$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

Figure 4: Average trust towards online information sources by age cohorts (ARMedia, mean on the scale from 1 “don’t trust at all” to 4 “trust very much”)



Gender has no influence on the likelihood of having used the Internet in the past 12 months, nor does it influence trust in online media and social networks. Interestingly, in 2011, males reported using social networking sites as a source of information for current events and news more frequently than females, with the difference being statistically significant.¹¹ By the year 2013, however, that discrepancy between genders had disappeared: females use social networking sites as a source of information as frequently as males.

Education influences Internet use. Those who reported having used the Internet in the last 12 months have a higher level of education.¹² For the year 2011, the more educated tend to be more trustful of online media,¹³ but the relationship disappears in 2013. Education does not seem to affect levels of trust in social networks, but it does affect the frequency of using them as a source of information about current events and news: the higher the level of education, the more frequently the respondent will use social networking sites as a source of information.¹⁴

Income: Respondents from households that perceive themselves to be relatively better off¹⁵ are also more likely to report having used the Internet in the last 12 months.¹⁶ They also

¹¹ T-test: $t(1375) = -2.106, p < 0.05$ for year 2011.

¹² T-test: $t(1398) = 13.896, p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

¹³ Pearson's correlation: $r = 0.128, N = 468, p < 0.005$ for year 2011.

¹⁴ Pearson's correlation: $r = -0.272, N = 1384, p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

¹⁵ The survey does not include questions on respondent or household income levels. Instead, the following question was used to estimate the relative well-being of respondents: “Please look at this card and tell me the answer which best reflects the current financial situation of your family/household. Money is not enough for food, Money is enough for the food, but not for clothes, Money is enough for food and clothes, but it is not enough for buying expensive things such as a TV and washing machine, We can afford some expensive goods (e.g., TV set or washing machine), We can afford expensive goods, to have summer vacation, to buy a car, but we cannot buy an apartment, We can buy even an apartment.”

report higher levels of trust in online media¹⁷ and social networks¹⁸ and are more frequent users of social networking sites as a source of information about current events and news.¹⁹

Settlement type: The majority of people in Yerevan (58%) report having used the Internet in the past 12 months, while this is not the case in other urban settlements and rural areas, where 45% and 36% of respondents reported doing so, respectively. The difference is statistically significant.²⁰ People in Yerevan are less trustful of online media and social networks, compared to residents of rural areas,²¹ although they use social networking sites more frequently to obtain information about current events and news.²²

4.2.2. Actual and Potential Activists

Civic initiatives need popular support. If activists want to attract more people to their cause, it is logical to target people that are more inclined towards taking political action. We use WVS data on four types of non-conventional political participation, discussed above (petitions, boycotts, demonstrations and strikes), as measurements of political activism. To simplify the analysis, we recalculated the original variables into new dummy variables, combining the “have done” and “might do” response categories, thus creating a simple dichotomy between people who said they would never engage in the type of political activity mentioned and those who are willing to or have already done so.

We examine each of the four types of political actions, assessing whether age, gender, education and income influence the likelihood of participation. We also note whether the picture in 2011 is different from that in 1997. Table 2 below summarises the results of t-test and chi-square analysis. Only statistically significant results are reported.

¹⁶ T-test: $t(1373) = 14.289$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

¹⁷ Pearson's $r = 0.212$, $N = 661$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

¹⁸ Pearson's $r = 0.163$, $N = 629$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

¹⁹ Pearson's correlation: $r = -0.364$, $N = 1359$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

²⁰ Chi-Square: $X^2 = 46.946$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

²¹ ANOVA: $F(2, 675) = 3.684$, $p < 0.05$ for online media variable and $F(2, 645) = 3.906$, $p < 0.05$ for the social network variable for the year 2013.

²² ANOVA: $F(2, 1381) = 19.400$, $p < 0.001$ for year 2013.

Table 2: Non-conventional political participation by socio-demographic variables, WVS

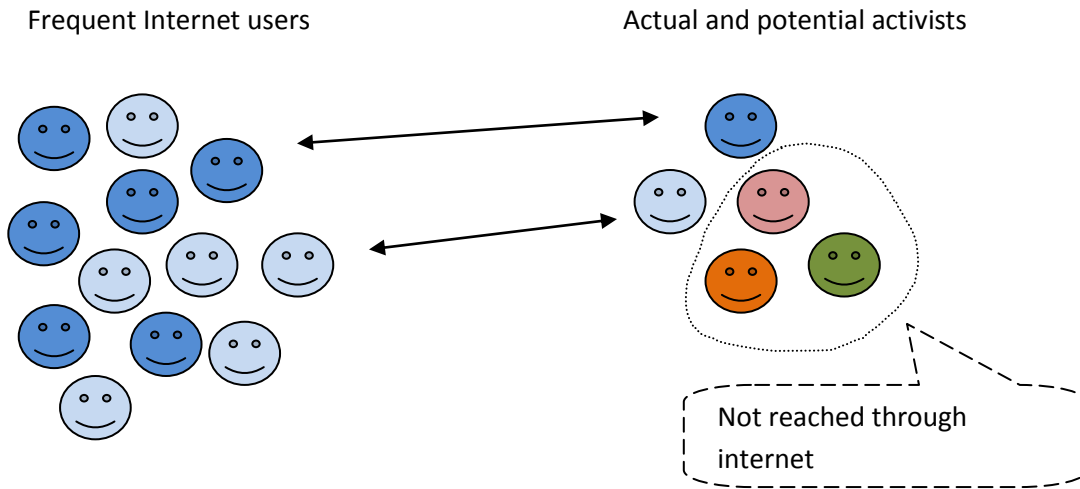
	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Income</i>
<i>Petition</i>	-	-	2011: more educated are more likely to participate	1997: better-off are less likely to participate
<i>Boycott</i>	1997: younger are more likely to participate	1997 and 2011: men are more likely to participate	1997 and 2011: more educated are more likely to participate	1997: better-off are less likely to participate
<i>Demonstration</i>	1997: younger are more likely to participate	1997: men are more likely to participate	1997 and 2011: more educated are more likely to participate	1997: better-off are less likely to participate
<i>Strike</i>	1997: younger are more likely to participate	1997: men are more likely to participate	1997 and 2011: more educated are more likely to participate	1997: better-off are less likely to participate

It is clear that in 1997 the distinction between those willing and unwilling to participate in non-conventional political activities was more pronounced: except for petitions (for which age, gender and education were irrelevant), participants were likely to be younger, more educated, lower income males. In 2011, the differences have all but disappeared, with the exception of education, which is relevant for all four types of political participation. Age and income are no longer relevant, and gender is relevant only for participation in boycotts: men are more likely to do so.

Thus, education is the most important predictor of activism. In that sense, there is a good match between the ‘portrait’ of an activist and a ‘portrait’ of a typical internet and social network user: more educated people use the Internet more often and more frequently use social networks to obtain information. The use of social networks as a tool to spread information and attract potential activists seems to be a sensible strategy to target those most likely to answer the call. In terms of other socio-demographic variables, there is less of a match. For instance, we found that younger people more frequently use the Internet and social networking sites as a source of information. However, older people and younger people are equally likely to participate in demonstrations. Hence, information spread through social networks misses some potential joiners of older age. The same can be said about income: better-off individuals are more likely to be on the receiving end of internet-transmitted information, but worse-off individuals are just as likely to partake in various types of activism. Our analysis shows that the ‘right’ people to target in an attempt to mobilise support are very heterogeneous, of whom the Internet captures only a part. **Error! Reference source not found.** below is a graphical reflection of the situation: frequent Internet users are a relatively larger but more homogenous group of younger, better-off people,

while actual and potential activists are a relatively smaller but more heterogeneous group of people of various ages and walks of life. Not all of them are reachable through the Internet.

Figure 5 Partial overlap between internet users and activists



4.3. Summing Up: Attitudes and Participation of the Broader Public

The picture of Armenian political culture, depicted by the survey data discussed in this chapter, is not very encouraging for emerging civic initiatives, but there are some positives. Factors that are potentially negative include low public confidence in social movements, extremely low membership in formal and informal organisations, and public attitude towards politics and political participation. People are disinterested in politics, even more so than in the early years of the newly independent RA. Given that attitude, it is probably a clever tactic for various Armenian civic initiatives to frame their activities as strictly non-political.

Non-conventional political participation was less common in 2011 than in 1997, but the heterogeneity of the participants had increased: in 1997, young, educated males with lower incomes were more likely to sign petitions and partake in boycotts, demonstrations and strikes. In 2011, age, gender and income levels no longer have predictive power. Education remains important: the higher the education level, the higher is the likelihood of participation.

Among the findings that can be interpreted as good news for civic activism is the fact that confidence in social movements has increased since the mid-1990s. Volunteering is on the rise. TV remains the main information source, but the Internet is spreading rapidly. One-third of the population uses social networking sites as sources of information about social and political events, making social networks a good venue for civic mobilisation. Drawing parallels between social media users and potential activists, we can see that social media reaches younger, more educated and financially better-off people, while potential activists come from all walks of life.

Thus, if civic initiatives aim to mobilise larger public support, the organisers need to consider how to spread information through methods other than social networks. If the information about civic initiatives is mostly or exclusively available through social networks, it will not reach those potential participants who are not users of social networks, or who are distrustful of new communication media.

V. Civic Initiatives in Armenia: General Overview and Analysis

An important new development in the realm of Armenian civil society is the relatively recent emergence of a new type of activities and organisational structures called ‘civic initiatives’. The term is a self-description used by a variety of issue-oriented, loosely horizontally structured groups of individual activists that unite around a common, often very specific cause (such as preventing construction in a public park, the preservation of an architecturally valuable building, or protests against a new mine). These new forms of civic participation have registered a number of victories since their emergence in 2008 (Ishkanian et al. 2013a) and are now an important and highly visible element of Armenian civil society that must be taken seriously. For instance, in 2013-2014 a series of large-scale well-organised protests against an unpopular pension reform caught the government and many analysts of Armenian civic activism by surprise. As a result, the implementation of the reform was postponed for at least six months. The Prime Minister resigned, and the government was re-shuffled, although officially, the Prime Minister’s resignation was the result of other, unexplained reasons. The most recent case of public activism was a protest against an increase in electricity prices, mostly referred to in the English-speaking media as the ‘Electric Yerevan’, after its twitter hash tag. In June 2015, thousands of people took to the streets in a non-stop, fortnight-long series of protests and sit-ins that blocked one of the capital’s main streets, several hundred meters from the Presidential Palace and the National Assembly. Both cases are discussed in detail below.

With the exception of these two cases, civic initiatives are small in numbers and often confined to Yerevan, or spearheaded from Yerevan, if a regional environmental issue is at stake. Since 2007, there have been at least 37 such initiatives, 12 of which had at least partial success. The core activists are young educated people; they use social media to organise and to spread information regarding their activities (Bagiyan 2015; Kankanyan 2015).

The gender aspect is an important dimension of civic activism. Some of the prominent Armenian activists are young women. They advocate feminist causes (such as social and cultural inequalities, domestic violence, selective abortion) but also join, or even lead, environmental protests and other civic campaigns. Similar to many other post-soviet societies (Funk and Mueller 1993), the public attitude towards feminists and female activism is sometimes negative.

Some segments of society perceive their activities to be anti-traditional and immoral, contradicting traditional Armenian family values.

5.1. Case Studies

5.1.1. Save Teghut Civic Initiative

▪ **Background: What is the issue?**

Teghut is a forest in Lori Marz in the north of Armenia. It is rich in flora and fauna: there are 200 species of plants, 55 mammal, 86 bird, ten reptile and four amphibian species. Six plant and 26 animal species are included in the Red Book of Armenia.

In 2001, the Armenian government granted a 25-year exploitation license for what was to become Armenia's second-largest copper-molybdenum mine, covering 1491 ha of territory near the village of Teghut. The license was issued to the Armenian Copper Programme. Some 82% of the territory allocated to mining is covered with pristine forest; 357 ha of the forest are to be cut down. "The lands were purchased at very low prices: around 10 US cents for a square meter... If exploited, the mining will result in about 500 million tons of tailings (highly toxic wastes composed of heavy metals) and 600 million tons of other types of waste, which will be disposed in the gorge of Duqanadzor River, resulting in 214 ha of territory contaminated with toxic waste" (Ishkanian et al. 2013b, 43).

Activists sounded the alarm early on and employed a broad repertoire of actions, described in detail below. They had no success. The factory for working with copper is already in operation; copper is being subtracted, and a tailing dump has been created. Nevertheless, the activists have not given up; among other activities, they continue contacting the relevant government bodies and providing them with undeniable evidence of the damage currently done to the environment and people living in the vicinity of the factory.

▪ **Chronology and the main developments**

Because this case is longstanding (having lasted more than eight years as of this writing), the chronology is presented in stages, borrowed from Kankanyan (2015).

Stage 1: Emergence and Development (2005-2007). Although the Save Teghut Civic Initiative emerged in 2007, there were some activities organised by several NGOs and independent activists as early as the end of 2005 (Kankanyan 2015). The activities were mainly aimed at collecting information about the company and its plans regarding the exploitation of the mine because the public was unaware of the project. This was the time period when NGOs raised the first concerns regarding the inevitable forest destruction and soil degradation. This period is marked by the active involvement of Diaspora Armenians. Such involvement is particularly reflected by personal appeals to the then-President Robert Kocharian: approximately 2,500 letters were mailed by Armenians from different corners of the world.

Despite concerns both within and outside Armenia, the project moved forward without any changes. The Diaspora's involvement gradually weakened and never returned to the levels of 2006. However, the activities described paved the way for the emergence of the civic initiative.

Stage 2: Active Involvement (2008-2011). Starting in 2008, the Teghut initiative made informing the general public about the issue their main strategy; their goal was for the Teghut issue to acquire a constant presence on the country's political and social agenda. In spring 2009, the activists picketed in front of the Ministry of Nature Protection and the government building every day for nearly a month. This created serious public pressure on government, resulting in two public hearings organised by the Prime Minister of Armenia. A petition was signed by 5,000 citizens and addressed to the President, Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament. Interestingly, the signatories were joined by the two first ladies (the wives of Armenia's second and third presidents), which however, had no influence on the future decision-making over the mine.

In 2009, several NGOs appealed to the Administrative Court of Armenia. They accused the government, the Ministry of Nature Protection, and the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of illegal approval of the exploitation of the Teghut mine. The Court rejected the appeal on the grounds that neither a group of people nor an NGO is eligible to defend the rights of other citizens or communities in court. The NGOs involved in the process appealed to the Cassation Court, which started a long chain of judicial decisions, ultimately leading nowhere.

Having achieved no success in domestic courts, the activists started to attract international attention to the issue. In September 2009, the Teghut group appealed to the Aarhus Convention Committee of the UN Economic Commission for Europe. The applicants claimed that Armenia had violated the Convention's two main principles: public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental issues.²³ The Committee responded by admitting that the government of Armenia failed to make its citizens aware of its project or to involve the parties affected in the decision-making process (Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee 2010). The activists interpreted this response as a partial success: the Aarhus Committee's decision favoured the position of the activists.

In 2011, the project was placed on hold because of the global economic crisis. The mining company started to seek funding, mainly from banks, hoping to secure a substantial loan from the Russian Vneshtorgbank (VTB) bank. Activist movement continued, now with a new focus, namely protesting outside banks and particularly VTB bank Armenia and the Yerevan office of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Two most visible protest events were in May and July 2011.

In September-October of 2011, the attention of both the activists and the general public was diverted to another case of environmental activism: a brief, intense and successful struggle to preserve a scenic Trchkan waterfall from disappearing under a hydropower plant dam. The

²³ Armenia has signed (in 1998) and ratified the Aarhus Convention (in 2001).

efforts to save the waterfall mean that the Teghut mine issue was unattended for some time (Kankanyan 2015).

Stage 4: Not Giving Up (2012-Present). After the Trchkan waterfall issue had been successfully resolved, there was ‘euphoria’ among the activists, as they managed to achieve the fulfilment of their demands. This gave them hope, and they embarked on influencing the policy in Teghut with double effort (Kankanyan 2015). The first major activity organised by the group at this stage was a march towards Teghut in January 2012. By approximate estimates, there were 200-300 people participating in the march. The activists were confronted by a large group of local residents working for the company, who opposed the activists and claimed they needed the jobs.

The strategy of referring to the law and involving the international community and regulatory bodies continued. There was an appeal to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 13 July 2012, stating that the rights of Shnogh and Teghut villagers were being violated and that they were being exposed to enormous health risk. Moreover, a report was submitted to the EU Commission describing the situation and its possible consequences.

In 2013, alternative economic development emerged as a new vector of strategy. The major argument for the opening of the mine was the economic benefit it would bring to local communities and the country in general. To counter that claim, the Teghut activists proposed an alternative, eco-friendly development strategy. As an alternative to mining, they argued in favour of honey and natural cosmetics businesses as examples of natural and environmentally sustainable products. To promote their ideas, the activists organised several honey fairs in Shnogh (September 2013) and Teghut (September 2014). The fairs also included other products, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts and homemade sweets. Some families hosted guests who had travelled from other cities to the fair. This was another source of income for the community members. More broadly, activists advocated developing eco-tourism in the region, which would create an alternative source of income: sustainable both in terms of preserving nature and contributing to the economic development of the communities.

Mining operations started in Teghut in 2014. Approximately 2,000 hectares were provided for mining, including forestland and community land. There was no change in the initial plan for the exploitation of the mine, but the activists did not give up and continued their struggle.

▪ **Current status of the initiative**

The initiative is characterised as on-going, as activities continue and, particularly, the initiative has reached a new institutional level: it rents and maintains a small office space in the centre of Yerevan. Its www.teghut.am website is well developed and saturated with information. The last website update was on 28 July 2015 (posting an open letter), but it also displays a link to the most recent Facebook group update on 17 April 2016.

In general, activists continue disseminating information about the mine, contacting the relevant government bodies and providing them with evidence of the damage currently done to

the environment and people living in the vicinity of the factory. The latest large-scale event organised by the activists was on 5 April 5 2014, the so-called alter-conference “Irresponsible Mining in Armenia.” In terms of outcome, the initiative is clearly a failure. It failed to achieve its main goal: preventing the mine’s construction.

▪ **Leaders**

Teghut is one of the oldest on-going civic activism campaigns; the core leadership underwent some changes over time, including an attempt at enlarging the coordinating group. The enlargement led to the formation of sub-groups with different visions; the sub-group in favour of more radical actions and closer cooperation with political actors eventually formed a spin-off Pan-Armenian Environmental Front.²⁴ The core team numbers stayed at approximately 5-7 people, with some dropouts and replacements over the years (A. Hakobyan 2016). It is also an interesting case of continuation despite fatigue and a search for alternatives when initial strategies do not seem effective. The shift in strategy described in this chronology is one example. Another example is that the activists admitted to have become “tired of being on the street” and looking for new, creative approaches to continue the struggle.

▪ **Gender dimension**

The issue of environmental preservation has no explicit gender dimension. Both female and male activists are involved as core leadership and as rank-and-file members. Young female activists are very visible and play a prominent role in the initiative. At some point, Mariam Sukhudyán (a young woman) was one of the key faces identified with the Teghut struggle. Her involvement and leadership is a dramatic story

On 13 August 2009, the Police of the RA initiated a criminal case against Mariam Sukhudyán that envisaged severe punishment in the form of imprisonment for up to five years. The case began when Mariam publicised allegations of sexual abuse made by the students against a teacher of Nubarashen School No 11, which is a special boarding school for disabled children (Armenian Weekly News Agency, 26 March 2010).

The activists believed that the reason for persecution was her participation in Teghut campaign (Panarmenian.Net News Agency, 19 August 2009). The move against Mariam Sukhudyán provoked outrage among activists and broader society. People involved considered the charges against the activist groundless. A group of art historians wrote an open letter, demanding a thorough investigation of the case. The press releases of some prominent NGOs, including Helsinki Association, Helsinki Citizen Assembly, PINK Armenia, Women Resource Center and others strongly condemned the criminal case and demanded that it cease immediately.²⁵

²⁴ Available at: <http://www.armecofront.net/en/about-us-2/>

²⁵ Ecolur: New Informational Policy In Ecology (01 September 2009), “Movement in Support of Mariam Sukhudyán Increases”, Retrieved from <http://www.ecolur.org/en/news/sos/movement-in-support-of-mariam-sukhudyán-increases/423/>

In March 2010, Mariam Sukhudyan was awarded the Women of Courage Award by the United States Embassy in Armenia. One day later, the law enforcement authorities announced that the criminal case against the activist was dropped (Armenian Weekly News Agency, 26 March 2010).

- **Internet and Social Media**

The initiative has its own well-developed and regularly updated website (www.teghut.am). The initiative also makes an active use of Facebook: there are both Facebook pages and Facebook groups maintained by the activists. The “Save Teghut Initiative Cause” page (1,676 likes) has existed since 2007 and is regularly updated. There is also another page, “Teghut Mine Community Organisation”, with 71 likes and various posts both related and unrelated to Teghut environmental issues. There are three Facebook groups: “Teghut” (with 151 members and active posts), “Save Teghut” (with 8,149 members and active posts) and “Save Teghut Forest” (with 3,551 members, currently inactive, last post from September 2012).

- **Scope, spread, duration**

This is the longest civic initiative in Armenia to date. Despite addressing an issue in another region of Armenia, it is spearheaded from Yerevan and has attracted little to no local support in the area affected by the mine (at least for the time being). The activists have cited the fact that Yerevan was the hub of the decision-making for activists while the issue they were seeking to address was located in a relatively remote area as a disadvantage that diminished their efficiency. The initiative can be characterised as moderate in scope: 200-300 people participating in a march and 8,000 members of Facebook groups are good numbers given the Armenian reality, but the initiative is definitely smaller than the two larger initiatives discussed later in this chapter.

- **NGOs**

There has been extensive engagement and support from NGOs, as described in the chronology. Some of the most prominent environmental, human rights and anti-corruption NGOs were involved at all stages. NGOs helped sound the alarm; they gathered and presented evidence, appealed to international organisations and attempted (unsuccessfully) local court litigation. This case exposed a gap in the law whereby NGOs cannot represent communities in the court. It was a learning experience for NGOs, which regarded this as an issue they needed to address at a higher level (i.e., seek a legislative change). Moreover, although the Teghut activists had a good relationship with and support from NGOs, at some point, they felt the need to establish their own NGO to apply for a donor grant for a specific activity they wanted to carry out: satellite imaging of the area to monitor the mining contract’s implementation. Thus, a new NGO was created as a result of this civic initiative.

5.1.2. Stop Changes in Maternity Leave Law

▪ **Background: What is the issue?**

This initiative is an interesting case of re-starting activism after a period of inaction. The initiative first came into being in 2011 as a response to a change in the legislation on temporary unemployment benefits enacted on December 1, 2010. The change affected pregnant working women, who would see their benefits cut. The initiative organised a number of activities, including protests, press conferences, and sending letters to legislative representatives and executive officials. In February 2011, under pressure from the activists, the media and the broader public, the government reversed its decision and restored the original provision of 100% paid maternity leave. The initiative has achieved its objectives; in the retrospect, we can say that it went into a dormant stage.

The impetus for the re-birth of activism was set when, in early October 2014, the government again proposed changes to the maternity leave law. Women who do not work would receive more money, while women who work would no longer receive compensation equal to their salaries when they are on maternity leave; instead, the sum would be dependent on the number of years they had worked. The “Stop Changes in Maternity Leave Law” initiative was re-launched as a reaction.

▪ **Chronology and the main developments**

On 23 October 2014, not only working mothers but also their children protested in front of the RA government building. Approximately 150 people participated in the demonstration. The protesters stated that if the Law on Luxury Tax was enforced, then not-working mothers could be financed from those taxes, not from funds that would otherwise go to working women.

On 29 October 2014, the activists of the initiative said that they were planning to address a letter to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. During a press conference organised by the Women’s Rights Centre (same day), the representatives of the centre said that if compensation during the maternity leave were to depend on the number of years worked, then women would postpone pregnancy until their work histories were long enough to entitle them to proper compensation.

During the 18 November 2014, session of the National Assembly, the latter stated that it would do everything possible to both increase the compensation of non-working mothers and give 100% salary compensation to high-income working women. Thus, the initiative can be characterised as a success, at least for the time being.

▪ **Current status of the initiative**

The government decision was reversed; hence, there is no need for active engagement at the moment. However, the initiative cannot be considered fully dissolved. There seems to be some organisational inertia present, and people involved remain active to some extent, particularly on social media. The current state of the initiative can be described as one of slow progress; it is not yet fully resolved or closed. As one of the leaders mentioned in one of the interviews, it has been

like a “spontaneous volcano” that, based on circumstances, erupted immediately and unexpectedly and has the potential to erupt again if necessary.

- **Leaders**

The leadership consisted of women: both activists and NGO leaders. One of the leaders was also an active member of the Dem Em initiative. The core activist group seems rather small: according to the information we gathered, the leadership was a group of 3-5 women, two of whom were active in both the first and second stage. The leadership seems very fluid and informal; a few concerned people simply took the initiative and acted based on circumstances.

- **Gender Dimension**

This is the only case that has an explicit gender dimension: the entire issue was gender based. Women comprised the core leadership and the majority of the initiative. A few active male members could also be found in the Facebook group. Moreover, gender was a boon to this case. Maternity (past, present or future) is perceived as an extremely important element of female identity in Armenia and commands deep respect. This issue was successfully employed by organisers and participants, who framed the problem around motherhood and encouraging women to have babies. Going against this frame cast the government in a negative light. An example of a poster stating “I want to be born in Armenia, while my government doesn’t” illustrates the power of such framing. One of the main activists was pregnant at the time; she gave a few public speeches, evoking strong emotions among the public and probably government officials. The government was essentially forced into a corner by arguments based on motherhood: one of the most important cherished and respected values held by Armenian society.

- **Internet and Social Media**

The campaign used a Facebook group “Stop changes in maternity leave law”, created in 2011, and used it again to mobilise the second wave of activism. The group currently has 2,266 members. The group is active, though not narrowly focused on the issue. There is a relevant post on 16 March 2016, although the group is dominated by themes of child-related theatre and TV advertising.

- **Scope, spread, duration**

The initiative can be characterised as relatively small-scale, despite that it raised issues relevant for all working women planning to have children. It did not spread beyond the capital and did not attract even moderate numbers of participants in the streets. More than 5,000 people signed a petition on www.change.org, but the number of participants ‘on the ground’ never exceeded 200 people.

- **NGOs**

In this case, there was close and clearly acknowledged cooperation with NGOs. Besides the fact that the majority of the members of the initiative were members of NGOs that deal with women's rights and/or gender equality, NGOs also hosted coordinating team meetings and supported the initiative with legal consulting and printing services. A previous study of this initiative found that NGO leaders made a conscious choice of not assuming a leading role in the initiative and instead provided logistical support. The strategy was motivated by NGOs' concern about existing anti-NGO stereotypes among the general public (Bagiyan 2015).

5.1.3. Dem Em (I am Against)

- **Background: What is the issue?**

At the end of 2013, it was announced that a new pension reform with a mandatory contribution component would be enforced beginning in January 2014. According to the new law, any citizen born after 1 January 1974 would have to pay 5% of his/her income to a special personal savings fund, which would be authorised and controlled by the government and the Central Bank. The money would be kept and invested on their behalf and made available to them upon retirement.

- **Chronology and the main developments**

The Dem Em team was established by the end of 2013; its main objective was opposing the mandatory component of the reform. The coordinating team consisted of 25-35 people, with the core 25 people constantly involved in the initiative. IT sector specialists were particularly influential in the core group and in the initiative in general. As they are a rather well-paid group, the 5% loss was perceived as non-trivial in this sector.

The initiative began as a social media discussion platform for people who had heard of the upcoming pension reform. The discussions were initiated to inform the public of the pension reform and determine the general mood. This period lasted 1-2 months. The initiators also used this time to conduct research and determine the experience of other countries that had implemented pension reforms. Journalists also became involved in the group by covering social media discussions.²⁶ Thus, the combination of activists and journalists contributed to developing the societal discourse on a governmental policy that would entail a change directly affecting every employed person in the country.

On 17 December 2013, Dem Em initiative published its main demands: to remove the mandatory element from the pension reform, to engage society and consult with it before making such decisions, and to hold a referendum before enforcing a new pension system.

Mass demonstrations started at the beginning of 2014. According to participants' estimates, approximately 10,000 people attended the 18 January 2014 demonstration against the mandatory component of the new pension system (Bagiyan 2015).

On 16 December 2014, deputies of the Armenian National Assembly from four non-governmental political parties filed an application to the Armenian Constitutional Court

²⁶ Lilit Arakelyan "Armenian Young Earners Fear Pension Reform". 13 November 2013, Yerevan, Armenia, available at: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenias-young-earners-fear-pension-reform>

concerning the constitutionality of eight articles of the Law on Funded Pensions (National Assembly of the RA 2010). The appeal was primarily a demand to rule the articles unconstitutional because they contravene constitutional provisions. According to the decision of the Constitutional Court announced on 2 April 2014, the articles of the law having any mention of a mandatory component (National Assembly of the RA 2010) contradicted the requirements of constitutional provisions, such as the right to property, protection of rights, fundamental human and civil rights and freedoms, and were thus void. For a detailed decision of each article and their corresponding contradicting constitutional provision, see the resume of the decision²⁷ of the Constitutional Court, which entered into force at the moment of its announcement (Constitutional Court of the RA 2014).

On 31 January 2014 the Dem Em initiative published a statement that called on the employers of the RA not to impose a mandatory 5% deduction from the salaries of their employees, as the Constitutional Court of the RA had suspended the enforcement of the mandatory contribution pension reform, arguing that further investigation was needed. On 27 February 2014 the Dem Em initiative made an announcement, stating that some members of the initiative had been under pressure for their activities. They said that they would resort to violent means if necessary.

In February, Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan, who had been one of the advocates of the law and repeatedly cited his ten years of work on the bill and consultations with specialists in the field, admitted that the law contained shortcomings. The Dem Em movement, referred to as “our young partners” by the Prime Minister, was invited for a dialogue with the government.²⁸ By the end of March 2014, the President of the National Assembly also acknowledged several mistakes in the reform.

On 3 April 2014, the Prime Minister resigned. Many people believed that one of the reasons for the resignation was the pension reform and the opposition towards it. On 18 April 2014 the newly appointed Prime Minister met with the activists of Dem Em protesting in front of the presidential palace and offered to cooperate.

On 1 July, the pension reform came into force without the mandatory component. The introduction of the mandatory component has not been completely eliminated from the government’s agenda, but it has at least been postponed for several years; the government is refining the reform package and some of the relevant legislation. Currently, the pension reform affects those who voluntarily opt for inclusion. The mandatory component will not enter into force until 2017. The delay of the implementation of the mandatory component would not likely have happened were it not for Dem Em and the highly visible public demonstration of discontent it managed to mobilise.

- **Current status of the initiative**

²⁷ Available at: <http://concourt.am/english/decisions/common/resume/1142.pdf>

²⁸ Caucasus Report “Is Armenia’s Government running scared, or Playing for Time?” April 03, 2014, available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia-pension-reform-protests/25319747.html>

Currently, a search for news on the initiative does not reveal much, which might be explained by the decrease in the initiative's activities. One of the last protests of the initiative took place in March 2014 and received substantial media coverage. Moreover, in May 2014, the initiative organised a "march of demand". However the Dem Em initiative remains active, as its representatives believe that the new pension system needs numerous reviews and corrections. Dem Em has participated in various other civic initiatives, including Electric Yerevan, having the goal of creating a more prosperous Armenia without having any political aims. This civic initiative is considered a partial success thus far.

- **Leaders**

According to the official website of the initiative, there are no leaders; decisions were made through consensus within online forums. The coordinating team consisted of 25-35 people, with the core 25 people constantly involved in the initiative. The coordinating team comprised primarily of accountants, lawyers and IT specialists. Dem Em has often been characterised as the most organised group, with decision-making rules and structures. Yet, it has also been criticised for being "closed" by some activists, who said they wanted to get involved but were not admitted into the inner circle of decision-making.

- **Gender Dimension**

Gender was not an explicit issue in this initiative. However, as mentioned above, IT sector specialists and other upper-middle class employees constituted the core of the initiative. These people are predominantly male; however some women were actively involved. The albums on the official Facebook page (including coverage of marches and protests) and general media coverage capture participation by both male and female activists.

- **Internet and Social Media**

The initiative had its own website (www.dem.am) created specifically for the purpose of spreading the information about the campaign. The website became inaccessible in May 2016 but was functional throughout April.

The initiative used social networks for informal forums among the activists and disseminated information on planned activities. The initiative has both a Facebook group and a Facebook page. The group had 50,407 members as of February 2016.²⁹ The group contains informative and motivational posts and articles and serves as a platform for discussion for the members of the initiative. There are also some posts on other civic initiatives, such as Afrikyan and Electric Yerevan. The page had 20,147 followers as of February 2016 and some posts over the preceding six months. Another Facebook page named "Dem Em Alaverdi" (656 followers) is an indication that the initiative was able to spread beyond the Capital (Alaverdi is a small town

²⁹ Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/659878787373449/>

in the North). The Twitter account of the initiative has 272 tweets and 61 followers. A petition created on www.change.org had 2,417 supporters.³⁰

▪ **Scope, spread, duration**

The scope of the initiative is difficult to estimate. The number of social media followers cited above gives a rough notion of the “online” aspect of activism and at least the minimum level of awareness and involvement. According to participants’ estimates, demonstration turnouts reached into the tens of thousands at some points. The initiative was mostly confined to Yerevan, but some activities were held in other regions. The above-mentioned Alaverdi Facebook page shows some awareness and solidarity in the north of Armenia. Photographs of demonstrations in Kapan (a small town in the South) are posted on the official Dem Em web page. The activists report activities in Gyumri, Kapan and Vanadzor. The active phase of the initiative (demonstrations and so forth) lasted for approximately four months.

▪ **NGOs**

NGOs were little involved and largely invisible. There was one instance of cooperation with the Bicycle Plus NGO. A bicycle tour within the central area of Yerevan was intended to increase the population’s awareness of the disadvantages of the new pension reform and to promote a healthy environment.

▪ **Other**

Although there was almost no NGO involvement, there was a substantial track record of cooperating with political parties, mainly the leading oppositional parties, including Heritage (Zharangutyun), Prosperous Armenia (BHK), Armenian National Congress (Azgayin Kongres) and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun). The political parties mentioned above submitted a case against the new law at the Constitutional Court of Armenia based on the fact that the new law breaches human rights stipulated by the main legal act of the state (Asbarez 2014). Those opposition parties, representing 44 Members of Parliament, held an emergency session debate, which was boycotted by the ruling party (HHK). The same four parties also presented a draft law that would postpone the implementation of the mandatory component of the pension reform for one year. However, the bill was rejected (54 to 46).³¹ It is worth highlighting that the four political parties had serious disagreements with one another and were ultimately united over the fight against the reform.³²

The initiative employed some creative strategies. Many supporters placed Dem Em stickers on their cars, showing they are a part of the movement and thus encouraging greater

³⁰ Available at: <https://www.change.org/p/հարօղւ-դէմ-էմ-ի-պարտադիր-կուտակալին-կենսաթոշակալին-համակարգին>

³¹ Caucasus Report “Is Armenia’s Government running scared, or Playing for Time?” April 03, 2014, available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/armenia-pension-reform-protests/25319747.html>

³² Ibid.

visibility and participation. Another creative strategy of the initiative has been mass cash withdrawals from banks, as well as late payments of utility bills. The activists employed the latter as a punishment measure against the government. The initiative also received increased public attention from celebrities. Some famous people such as Arman Nshanyan (singer/actor), Sos Janibekyan (actor), Lusine Tovmasyan (TV reporter), Suren Tadevosyan (director) and others declared their support for the initiative.

5.1.4. Let's Preserve the Afrikyan Club Building

▪ Background: What is the issue?

The 11 Teryan Street Building in Yerevan was built at the end of the 19th century by a wealthy Afrikyan family. It has since become known as the “Afrikyan club” building: a gathering place of the town’s intellectuals and the elite, where various issues were discussed and debated. In 1926, the building was nationalised and taken over by the Soviet security apparatus. From that building one of the most renowned 20th century Armenian poets, Yeghishe Charents, was taken and imprisoned as an “anti-Soviet element” in 1937 during the Stalinist purges. Later, the house was turned into an apartment block for 30 families.³³

In 2014, the lot was sold to “Millennium Construction” LLC, despite the fact that the building had been recognised by the government of the RA as a place of eminent public interest in 2007 (decision N108). It was decided to transfer the stones of the building to a space in the centre of Yerevan, where the “Old Yerevan” project was to be implemented at some unspecified future point in time.

▪ Chronology and the main developments

On 9 June 2014, there was a call by the initiators of the “Let’s Preserve the Afrikyan Club Building” campaign to the citizens concerned with the future of the old building. The statement, issued by the activists, indicated that the building was more than 130 years old, and the stones of the building were enumerated so that they could be transported and restored in another place; however, according to the same statement, such promises regarding other monuments had not been realised. The statement further declared that the activists were not only attempting to preserve the identity of Yerevan, but they were also concerned with the fate of the residents of the building. The statement ended with a call to the people to join the initiative as a sign of solidarity, mentioning this as an opportunity to prevent further destruction of Yerevan’s historic landmarks.

Later on the same day, as a sign of protest, people started to erase the numbers from the stones of the building and pull down the wall erected by the developer, in an effort to save the building. The police arrived and arrested one of the activists (Vahagn Gevorgyan). Thereafter, the protesters exhibited considerable opposition to the police by not allowing them to arrest anyone else. The protesters managed to break the wall erected by the developer.

³³ Information taken from an Armenian-language online source, available at: <http://ankakh.com/article/28112/%E2%80%8Bafrikanyer>

On 13 June 2014, activists started to disseminate flowers and flyers to passers-by, explaining why the building was important for Yerevan, and calling on people to join the initiative. On 17 June 2014 the activists addressed a letter to the diplomatic missions accredited in Armenia, namely to the Council of Europe, EU Delegation, the Ambassadors of France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and to the Consul of Norway. The letter stated that the government of the RA had violated the European Convention for the Protection of Architectural Heritage (Granada, 3.10.1985). According to the 5th article of the Convention, the displacement of a monument is forbidden unless such displacement is for preservation purposes. The letter asked foreign missions, as guarantors of the Granada Convention, to react and assist.

On 17-20 June, activists of the initiative organised peaceful rallies in the centre of Yerevan. The aim of these rallies was to inform the citizens so that they could join the initiative. However, only approximately 30-40 people attended those rallies.

On 23 June 2014, the Afrikyan initiative issued a statement about the Helsinki Committee of Armenia and UrbanLab Yerevan NGO having filed a lawsuit in an administrative court of the RA to declare void the City Hall's and government's decisions (N 1845-U from 26.08.2005 and N 108-Ն from 25.01.2007, respectively) regarding the dismantling of the building.

On 24 June world-famous piano player Tigran Hamasyan gave a performance in the yard of the Afrikyan club building. The day is considered the most well known and well attended because of the performance. This was not the only case of such activities. While they could, the activists used the yard of the building for musical performances and other cultural events, such as movie screenings.

During the following days, the protesters continued to climb onto the roof of the building, expressing their opposition to the on-going construction work. There were rumours in the media that the building to be constructed would actually belong to the Minister of Finance. Soon, articles were published that claimed that the Minister and his relatives had nothing to do with the building.

By the beginning of September 2014, the building had been removed. It is supposed to be restored later under the framework of the project "Old Yerevan", but no one is certain when that project will begin. On 23 September 2014, an open letter was addressed by Armenian celebrities (including actors, singers and artists) to the President of the RA, Serzh Sargsyan, asking him to pay attention to activities endangering the identity of Yerevan and asking his assistance in restoring the Afrikyan building as soon as possible.

In June 2014 the Transparency International Anticorruption Center (TIAC) NGO filed a complaint regarding the demolition of the building. The RA Police investigation department however refused to initiate a criminal case because of the absence of corpus delicti. The Yerevan city prosecutor's office rejected TIAC's complaint against this decision, which led the organisation to file another complaint to the general jurisdiction court. However, the court dismissed the complaint, which was followed by the organisation referring to the RA criminal

court of appeal. In April 2015, the court dismissed the appeal (“TIAC’s Appeal on Afrikyan Case Was Dismissed” 2016).

- **Current status of the initiative**

The initiative has ceased and is classified as a failure. No activities could be detected in a media search. Social media is also silent on the matter.

- **Leaders**

Bagiyan (2015) describes this initiative as rather disorganised, although there was a small core group of activists. Our study depicts a similar picture. There seems to be a loosely organised core of some 3-4 activists who led the initiative. Some of our interviewees described the organisation as rather chaotic, attributing this to the fact that mostly ‘arts’ people were involved and that they seemed to have a specific, ‘artsy’ type of spontaneity, rather than structure and order. The activists also regretted their inability to continuously occupy the site, which might have helped save it.

- **Gender Dimension**

The issue is not connected to gender. Both women and men were actively involved in the case, including a female activist in the small core of leaders. Activists recall that a number of women were involved, perhaps even slightly outnumbering the men.

- **Internet and Social Media**

Three Facebook units connected to the Afrikyan case were identified: a closed group, an open group and a page. The Architects for Afrikyan closed group has 36 members; an open group with an identical name has 36 members; it appears that the public group has never been active. The Facebook page has 1,958 likes and was last updated on 10 October 2015.

- **Scope, spread, duration**

The initiative was the smallest in scope of the five cases under study. Judging by social media and the accounts of rally participants, it largely failed to attract public attention, with the exception of a concert by a famous piano player. It was also very limited in scope, which is partially explained by the fact that it was targeted at a particular site in Yerevan, although the activists did make an effort to frame it as a larger issue of preserving Yerevan’s “historic face” and relating the fate of the Afrikyan building to other similar old buildings that have disappeared. Naturally, it did not spread beyond the capital.

- **NGOs**

This case is a good example of the fluidity and uncertainty of something as seemingly simple as NGO involvement in a civic campaign. NGOs were clearly involved: the Urban Lab, the TIAC and the Helsinki Committee of Armenia provided support and attempted judicial action to defend the building. There were several activists who were also NGO members and even NGO leaders.

However Bagiyani (2015) reports that there was confusion among the participants regarding the capacity in which they participated. NGO member participants made contradicting statements: while one member stated that s/he participated as an individual, another member of the same NGO stated that this was an issue that their organisation had a stake in; hence, such participation represented NGO involvement. Apart from participating in protests, NGOs had institutional involvement in the case: three organisations filed lawsuits against Yerevan Municipality; several cultural NGOs were involved in designing press releases and organising various cultural events. Interestingly, this formal participation went unnoticed by some activists, who claimed no NGO involvement in the case (Bagiyani 2015).

5.1.5. Electric Yerevan

▪ **Background: What is the issue?**

The electricity supply in Armenia is exclusively provided by the Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA). Since 2006, the company has been owned by a Russian energy holding company “Inter RAO UES”. It has thrice increased electricity prices: in 2009, 2013 and 2014. As a result, in 2015, people were paying nearly twice as much for electricity as they had been paying in 2008: approximately eight US cents per kWh. According to data released by an Armenian NGO, this was the highest price among all post-soviet republics, except Lithuania and Latvia (Epress News 2015).

In May 2015, ENA applied to Armenia’s Public Services Regulatory Commission to request a further increase in electricity prices, citing low profits and accumulated debts over the past few years. The Commission did not approve the requested increase of 41% (17 AMD, approximately 4 US cents), but it did approve a more modest price increase of 17% (7 AMD, approximately 1.5 US cents) on June 17, 2015. This increase is what sparked the protests, now commonly referred to as Electric Yerevan. However, that name is somewhat misleading: the protests were not confined to Yerevan but quickly spread beyond the capital.

▪ **Chronology and the main developments**

According to some news sources (Baitarian 2015), the first protest was staged by a group of youth activists affiliated with the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun political party. On the same day as the decision to raise prices (June 17), activists gathered in front of the Public Services Regulatory Commission’s office. As a result of clashes with the police, several activists were arrested and released hours later. This episode is not mentioned in any major subsequent news story on how the protests unfolded.

On June 19, a larger crowd, describing themselves as ‘concerned citizens’ not affiliated with any political party, gathered at the Liberty Square in the centre of the city. They protested the price increase and announced that the government had three days to meet their demands.

The three days passed, and the demands were not met, so the activists moved on to the next stage of the plan. On the evening of 22 June, they marched to Baghramyan Avenue: one of the central streets housing the Presidential Palace, the National Assembly (the Parliament), the Constitutional Court and a number of embassies. News reports (Azatutyun June 23, 2015;

CivilNet July 1, 2015) and other accounts (Avedissian 2015) reported the number of participants in the thousands and mention the activist group “No to Plunder”. The protesters were warned by Yerevan’s Deputy Police Chief, Valeri Osipyan, that their march was illegal and that they would be met by police resistance. Nonetheless, the demonstrators proceeded towards the Presidential Palace, where they were met with riot police who had blocked Baghramyan Avenue. Water cannons and other machinery were present on site. News reports describe the security presence as “out in full force.” At this point, the activists made a decision, which was later described as spontaneous by the participants. They decided to “sit on the street” and stay the night. In the early hours of the morning, the riot police began dispersing the crowd (which now consisted of only a few hundred people) using water cannons and batons. There were scores of plainclothes officers participating in the dispersal and rounding-up activists. The police also mistreated journalists, and some recording equipment was damaged. A total of 237 people were detained in different police stations throughout the city (Movsisian et al. 2015). According to the Armenian police, 29 people suffered injuries, including 11 police officers.

The level of police violence employed during the protest dispersal clearly backfired. On 23 June the morning after the use of the water cannons, there were various statements from organisations and officials condemning police violence, interference with journalistic work, and so forth. Protests resumed and grew in numbers. Police held their positions but did not hinder the demonstrations. Some estimate the size of the crowd gathered at Baghramyan Avenue the evening after the water cannon dispersal at 15,000 (Baitarian 2015). The protesters erected a makeshift barrier to separate them from the police lines. The protesters used a single line of empty plastic garbage bins. Interestingly, that barrier is almost always referred to as a “barricade” in the media, although it barely reached a meter high and could have been easily moved aside or vaulted.

Two weeks of standoff followed the early demonstrations, the spontaneous overnight “sit in” and the water cannon dispersal. These attracted the attention of the international media and became widely known as the Electric Yerevan, although the protests were not confined to the capital city. The hash tag #ElectricYerevan went viral on twitter. Hundreds would be present on Baghramyan Avenue during the days, and thousands participated in the evenings, with some of the hard core camping on the street overnight (sleeping on the ground; no tents or other temporary constructions were erected). CivilNet reported 10,000 – 20,000 on the evening of 25 June 2015, with approximately 800 staying overnight.

A high level of self-organisation was evident. People were brining and distributing food and water and cleaning up after themselves. In a matter of days, several “working groups” (such as legal, logistics, PR) appeared; posters were attached to trees and lampposts signalling the places where the groups were to meet. The atmosphere was peaceful during the day and rather festive in the evenings: singing, dancing, and drumming were a constant feature of evening gatherings. There was a strong national element in all of these events: Armenian flags were abundant (no other flags were permitted according to an internal agreement among the activists), Armenian folk music and dance were a constant feature of the evening gatherings. A couple of

weddings took place on Baghramyan, adding to the festive mood. The protesters made extensive use of humour: on posters and in dressing up in swimming suits (a joke regarding the use of water cannons). The protesters repeatedly sought to emphasise a peaceful attitude towards the police: those on the other side of the “barricade” were regularly offered food, sweets, and fruits. There were also cases of cooperation: altering the police to the fact that some drunk and aggressive people were among the protesters and asking police assistance in removing them.

On Sunday 28 June, the President made some concessions and called for an audit and state subsidies to cover the increased price faced by the people (but not for businesses). People would not have to pay until the completion of the audit. Some interpreted this as a partial success and suggested re-locating to Opera Square, while others insisted on staying in place. What followed was a split, which the leaders later attempted to mend and even deny. Nevertheless, there were eyewitnesses and a media report on the split. The “No to Plunder” activist group, which has been in charge up to that point, led a small group of followers towards Opera Square amid cries of “shame” and accusations of betrayal. Radio Liberty reported “...some visibly shocked activists of the group said that their movement has been hijacked by more radical elements.” Those who remained were threatened by another violent break-up. At one point, the fully geared riot police and water cannons started moving towards the demonstration. A number of Armenian opposition politicians and prominent figures lined up in front of the barricade. The police moved back (Danielyan, Movsisian, and Harutyunyan 2015).

On 30 June 2015 the groups re-united. People involved attempted to say that there had been no split at all and that reports of one were misinformation. The crowds and the festive mood returned to the evenings, but numbers declined gradually over the subsequent days. The “No to Plunder” said that they renounced whatever coordinating responsibilities they had previously held; a new leadership seemed to be emerging. Davit Sanasarian (Zharangutyun and a member of Yerevan’s municipal assembly) became more visible and vocal. The mood was becoming more political; anti-government posters started to appear, and some of the speakers on an improvised podium made statements such as “we will have a liberated Armenia at the end of this struggle.”

On 4 July, the new leaders of the protests issued an ultimatum about advancing to the Presidential Palace if their demand that the electricity price hike were not met. This was likely more than the authorities were willing to tolerate. Moreover, the numbers had clearly dwindled: at some hours, there were barely 50-60 people present on the street.

On 6 July, Baghramyan was cleared; 46 people were detained but released shortly thereafter. When the street was cleared, there were approximately 100-200 people present. No use of water cannons or batons was reported. The street clearing occurred in the early afternoon, hours before the expiry of an ultimatum (to advance towards the Presidential Palace). Apparently, the protesters sat down, to make it more difficult to disperse them, but did not resist in any other way, making it very non-violent.

The clearing of the street marked the end of major visible activities. Ten days later, approximately one hundred activists briefly blocked a major traffic intersection in the centre of the city, protesting the demotions and reprimands of some police officers announced over the

previous days. The protesters deemed these punishments insufficient and called for stricter measures against the police officers who had used violence in previous incidents. After sitting in the street for approximately 20 minutes, the protesters resumed their march towards the office of the Prosecutor General and submitted a petition. This action had almost no resonance among the public. On 28 July yet another attempt at organising a sit-in on Republic Square failed. Two more attempts at rallying people were made in September. Those attracted approximately one hundred people and failed to create a lasting impact. The protests subsided.

The government ordered an audit by an international company, Deloitte & Touche, in mid-August 2015. The audit report revealed mismanagement but also justified the price hike: the company was bordering on bankruptcy. In an interesting development, days after the publication of the audit report, an Armenian-born Russian businessman announced that he would be purchasing ENA. The new owner pledged to continue subsidizing electricity prices for another year and to implement an “anti-crisis programme” and a modernisation of the company (Danielyan and Gabrielian 2015).

- **Current status of the initiative**

The latest post on the “No to Plunder” website is from December 2015. The activities on the corresponding Facebook page also stopped at around that time, except for one page that is actively posting political news and sharing opinions. A news search reveals no new articles. One of the original leaders officially quit in August 2015 (Azatutyun October 10, 2015).

- **Leaders**

There was leadership ‘drift’ from the original group to a more radical group that took over when the original leaders were prepared to weaken the pressure on the government, after the President made some concessions. The original leadership group consisted of approximately 10-13 people (A. Hakobyan 2016).

- **Gender Dimension**

The initiative had no explicit gender dimension. All visible leaders were males. Females were present in the demonstrations in equal proportion to males. However, the initiative touched upon the gender issue in an unexpected way. Some of the rhetoric and symbols used on posters were considered distinctly masculine and inappropriate for public display, particularly in the presence of children and women. The amount of public exposure made some feel uncomfortable, while others welcomed the new level of openness and breaking stereotypes in political humour and the use of visuals during protests. Some female activists complained that their male counterparts were too protective: asking them not to be on the front lines or to stay overnight for the sake of their own safety. Thus, implicitly, the gender narrative is part of this campaign.

- **Internet and Social Media**

The initiative had a website, No to Plunder <http://vochtalanin.am/>, which is no longer available. While the website was active, we examined its content. It was last updated in December 2015. A

Voch Talanin (No to Plunder) Facebook page (registered as a public figure) has 8,291 likes (as of May 2016). There are also two public groups, Voch Talanin (13,754 members) and Voch Talanin – Aragatsotn (a region of Armenia, 39 members). There are also two community pages with the identical name of ElectricYerevan, but with different numbers of likes (3,577 and 2,027) different pictures and somewhat different information posted. It appears that the page with fewer likes is meant to cater to English-speaking users' needs; it has been inactive since September 2015. The page with 3,577 likes is regularly updated with political news, mostly of oppositional character.

An interesting episode worth mentioning is a Facebook initiative to turn off the lights for an hour was created at the outset of the protests. It received 9,000 “attending” on the first day. Yet, it made no visible impact, with no talking or discussion. It appears that the initiative did not get off the ground.

- **Scope, spread, duration**

The active period lasted for two weeks and involved tens of thousands of demonstrators. This was the largest activism campaign in Armenia, not counting the Karabakh Movement of 1988-91. The action spread beyond Yerevan. Protests also took place in Gyumri, Stepanavan, and Spitak.

- **NGOs**

NGOs were not visible during the protests, not at any other stage of the activism. They did play a role as information providers: a report by an NGO was used as a basis for the argument that Armenians already paid too much for electricity, compared to other post-Soviet countries. Transparency International publicised a few facts exposing ENA's mismanagement and questionable procurement deals.

- **Other**

There was a continuous and repeatedly enforced strategy to use Armenian symbols only. This became particularly important because the Russian media continued drawing parallels with the Ukrainian Maidan and alleging external interferences and a “Western” hand behind the protests. To counter those allegations, placards such as “This is not Maidan, this is Marshal Baghramyan” and “Baghramyan will never become Maidan” appeared. If non-Armenian flags were raised, people who held them were asked to remove them, including a senior Armenian politician and twice Presidential candidate, Paruyr Hairikyan, who appeared on 2 July with an EU flag and was told to leave.

5.2. Discussion of the Cases

Our study reviews five cases of civic activism in Armenia. The five are very different in nearly every respect: the scope ranges from tiny to huge, there are failures, triumphs and partial

successes, stories of persistence and cases of running out of steam, egoism and suspicion, altruism and money-driven concerns. Some patterns can be discerned from the diversity.

Each case had its specificities. The Teghut case is unique in its duration. It shows an impressive level of endurance despite setbacks and an inability to prevent the mine from being constructed and operated. When it failed to address its main objective, it formulated new goals and remained active, unlike, for example, the Afrikyan case. In the latter case, the failure to save the building signalled the end of the struggle. It needed not be so. The group could have shifted its attention to following up on what happened to the stones of the building or continued to monitor the conditions of other endangered cultural sites. Instead, the activities subsided. The Maternity Leave case is unique in that it shows how an initiative can become dormant, following an initial success, and then become activated again as the need arises. It is also a case of very powerful framing, which could be an explanation of its success. The Afrikyan case can be considered a powerful reminder to those who cherish spontaneous activism. While bottom-up creative energies are certainly important, a campaign requires at least some basic level of organisation. Dem Em is the perfect contrast in that respect. Its distinctive feature was its level of organisation and sense of professionalism. For instance, Dem Em participants spoke of “branding” during interviews, a language hardly used by other activists. A well-developed website was up early in the campaign. The leadership group was well defined and closed to ‘outsiders’; decision-making procedures were fairly formalised. The last campaign, Electric Yerevan, was the most intense (two weeks of non-stop action), drew large crowds, but was brief (perhaps an unavoidable trade-off of intensity). Unlike other campaigns, it was also fairly simple in terms of repertoire: it was what can be considered a classic street protest campaign.

In terms of similarities, the three campaigns that registered at least some success (Maternity, Dem Em and Electric Yerevan) were all related to personal financial benefits for large segments of the population. The two failed initiatives (Teghut and Afrikyan) were both aimed at protecting a public good: a clean environment in one case and the cultural heritage of the capital in the other. Another observation is that longer campaigns, such as Teghut and Dem Em, either evolve organisational structures or begin well organised. The Maternity campaign also provides partial support for this argument: the initial campaign was not long (a few months), but it created structures (personal and online networks) that were used for subsequent mobilisation years later.

In terms of the patterns of interaction between activists and NGOs, our five cases reveal a spectrum from one-time, minor involvement to well-functioning collaboration. It is worth noting that the success of activism campaigns is not related to NGO involvement. Our two failed cases, Teghut and Afrikyan, both had prominent NGOs involved. Dem Em and Electric Yerevan were the two most widely supported campaigns, which pushed the government to at least temporarily reverse its decisions; they had almost no NGO involvement. Maternity Leave is a curious case of a brief, small, yet effective campaign with a high level of organisational involvement and low public involvement.

VI. Civic Initiatives and NGOs

Although civic initiatives are considered relatively recent entities in the Armenian civil society ecosystem, mini-movements resembling spontaneous self-organisation were periodically evident even before 2008. The relationships between NGOs and less institutionalised elements of civil society are also not a new development. When discussing the 2003 presidential elections in Armenia, Ishkanian (2008) describes how following the post-election unrest and governmental backlash against opposition and human rights activists, NGOs cooperated with Yerevan State University student-led youth movement and how that cooperation challenged and changed NGO strategies.

We [the NGOs] had been thinking of holding a roundtable during those days and the youth leaders said, 'Enough of roundtables! Let's do an action.' The leaders of the youth movement were able to collect a large group of people who would participate in the march and pickets. That is how the initiative came into being. This was something new for us because all the NGO events in Armenia are the same; we either hold conferences, roundtables, seminars, or trainings (an interview with an NGO leader, quoted in Ishkanian (2008, 53).

As NGOs engaged in more direct street actions of protests and picketing, many of Ishkanian's interlocutors emphasised that it was important for NGOs "...to participate on voluntary basis and to avoid taking financial assistance from any donor organisations so that their actions would not be seen as being directed by outside forces..." They characterised their activities as "civil society action, not an NGO action." Ishkanian (2008, 52–53)

The youth movement leaders explained their motivation for working with NGOs because they believed combining efforts would be more effective.

We had to convince them [the NGOs] to get out of their offices and meeting rooms and into the streets. Some of them were more willing than others and it became very clear in those days who was actually a genuine supporter of human rights and freedoms and who was in it [the NGO work] for the grants and trips abroad (interview with youth movement leader quoted in Ishkanian (2008, 53).

When comparing civic initiatives and NGOs at present, the picture is similar to that depicted in the quotes reported in Ishkanian's study. Civic initiatives are distinctly different from NGOs. First and foremost, activists engaged in these initiatives explicitly refuse any foreign funding. They do not want to risk de-legitimisation in the eyes of the public and government officials by accepting funding from international development organisations and thereby become accountable to a force that is ultimately external to Armenia. They believe that relying on foreign funding (in some cases on any funding except voluntary labour and personal contributions) would diminish their ability to speak on behalf of themselves and people affected by decisions


they attempt to overturn. Another difference is a strong preference to maintain organisational structures at a minimum and avoid hierarchies, thereby encouraging a ‘participatory democracy’ style of self-organisation that can tap into the creative energies of all people involved and create experiences of empowerment and ownership. On the negative side, such structures are difficult to maintain on a large scale and over extended periods of time. Institutionalisation does not occur; groups are at a constant risk of ‘petering out’ if participants become disillusioned, busy, interested in something else, and so forth.

Several other weaknesses of civic activism can be noted here. Most civic initiatives are reactions to government decisions or events, rather than pro-active goals for changing the Armenian reality. Many activists position themselves as ‘outside of politics,’ although some of the issues they raise are inherently political, such as the opposition to the government-proposed pension reform. The rejection of politics also means rejection of political players, such as the opposition political parties, which could be valuable allies in many cases.

6.1. How do NGOs and Activists Interact?

Our five cases reveal very different patterns of interaction between NGOs and civic initiatives: from close cooperation to being barely visible and involved on the margins. On the positive end of cooperation are cases such as Teghut and Maternity Leave, where NGOs were explicitly and extensively involved. In the case of Maternity Leave, NGOs intentionally preferred to remain in the background but were instrumental in providing coordination, logistics and ‘foot soldiers’ (i.e., NGO members participating in demonstrations). In the case of Teghut, NGOs performed a wide range of activities: from awareness-raising to court litigation. The Afrikyan case is a curious example of confusion over the role of NGOs: while they were involved, their involvement went unnoticed by some core activists. This is a good example that NGOs could be doing work that goes unnoticed and is easily dismissed. Dem Em and Electric Yerevan are on the other end of the continuum, with barely any NGO involvement. In the case of Dem Em, there was an isolated minor episode of a sports club helping publicise the case once. In the case of Electric Yerevan, NGOs were not involved, but the information they provided was used to strengthen the arguments of the protesters. Table 3 below schematically presents NGO involvement in the five cases of civic activism, with some examples of types of activities.

Table 3. NGO involvement in civic activism

Level of involvement	Minimal involvement	Moderate involvement	Active involvement
			
Civic Initiative	Dem Em; Electric Yerevan	Afrikyan	Teghut; Maternity Leave
Types of Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - publicise the case; - fact-finding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - court litigation; - logistics; - participation in demonstrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - court litigation; - logistics; - coordination; - participation in demonstrations; - legal consulting; - fact-finding

Those activists who have experience interacting with NGOs usually describe it as positive and useful. As we observed, leading activists are often also NGO members (currently or in the past). Many of them mentioned NGO affiliation or work as part of the story of how they became involved in civic activism. Many activists, however, have dismissive or negative attitudes towards NGOs, as discussed below.

NGO leaders and members describe their interaction with activists as positive and fruitful. NGOs have financial resources, whereas activists have human resources. According to NGO members, the two groups coming together benefits the larger society. The majority of NGO leaders and members interviewed recall examples of successful cooperation between the two groups, describing the cooperation as “a natural development.” NGOs see their role as professionals guiding and providing support to civic activists.

Some NGO interviewees noted difficulties in cooperation between the two groups due to a lack of consensus and mutual understanding. They lamented a certain amount of “conspiratorial thinking” regarding who does what and represents who. This (in the words of one NGO leader) has become a social disease, reflecting the overall deficit of social trust.

6.2. How do NGOs and Activists Perceive Each Other?

While mutual perceptions are discussed in detail and from various points of view in later chapters, the main points can be highlighted here, as a summary of the case-based discussion of NGO-activist relationships. Many activists indicate the importance of distinguishing several NGOs now operating in the country from the rest. There are some strong and committed organisations, which should not be judged together with the rest of the sector.

“You need to filter NGOs and understand which ones are pocket NGOs, in the government’s pocket, which ones are just donor NGOs, doing only donors’, particularly foreign government donors’ projects, and which ones are NGOs with social interests and large membership.” Female activist, 32

The ‘real’ organisations are few; aside from those, the more than 4,000 NGOs currently registered in Armenia are perceived as highly restricted by their donor commitments at best and worthless and even harmful at worst.

Activists’ perceptions of NGOs range from positive to negative. Many activists with positive perceptions have experience being involved with an NGO and highlight that they developed into active citizens because of that experience. These activists highlight the importance of NGOs for the success of activist campaigns, mentioning specific examples of cooperation in addressing a common cause. Some activists have negative attitudes towards NGOs, seeing them as unhelpful, or even harmful, to the general development of the country. This group of activists advocates the role of activist campaigns as the only means of delivering change. They believe that the role of NGOs has become secondary in the republic, if visible at all. This group believes that more can be achieved via informal measures, rather than with the help of formal entities.

Some activists note that it is difficult to determine the reasons that NGOs join civic campaigns.

“Because organisations are funded, one never knows if they join the protest because they believe in the cause, or because they are paid for it.” Female activist, 38

This undermines the legitimacy and the sincerity of NGO participation in the eyes of the activists. There is also a visible lack of knowledge and understanding of what NGOs do, particularly given that their work is not always visible and almost never advertised. As a result, sweeping dismissals of NGO work are not uncommon among activists.

“To me, their [NGOs’] activities are characterised by printing a brochure. Nothing else. But I believe they could have done more.” Female activist, 38

The quote above came from an activist who was involved in the Maternity Leave campaign, which had probably most coordinated and substantial NGO support. Recall that NGOs chose to remain in the background in this case.

NGO leaders and staff have overwhelmingly positive perceptions of civic activism, and its current importance in the country, with exceptions that concern specific individuals and their particular behaviour. They call civic activists “the progressive part of the public”; some claim that civic initiatives are able to set the agenda for the country, on par with the government. Civic initiatives are lauded for breaking stereotypes of public helplessness in the face of government decisions.

Thus, in terms of attitudes, NGOs are consistently positive in their perceptions of activists and supportive to the extent possible. Of course, we were speaking with a specific subset of the NGO sector: those who choose to become involved. We believe that this approach is justified because we wanted to understand the patterns of interaction, and thus it was reasonable

to seek out those organisations that attempted to interact. Contrary to our expectation (and despite probing and explicitly asking), we received very few accounts of negative experiences from the NGOs. The rare criticism concerned specific instances of individual behaviour.

The positive attitude of NGOs is contrasted with the guarded attitude of the activists. Although many of them have experience working in the NGO sector (and cite that experience as a reason for becoming active), their attitude towards NGOs is cautious. Some activists differentiate between “good” and “bad” NGOs and note that the NGO sector as a whole is dominated by donor-driven NGOs and is tainted by governmentally-organised organisations (GONGO). Many activists fail to notice the work of NGOs, even when they are actively involved in the very campaigns that the activists join. Blanket dismissals of NGOs as “grant eaters” and “brochure printers” are not uncommon.

It is likely safe to assume that both sides, the NGOs and the activists, are still learning and discovering each other’s strengths. Civic activism seems to be the arena in which civil society is able to overcome the post-communist syndrome of disengagement. Civic initiatives are a locally invented term to describe new forms of participation since 2007. There have been more than 30 such civic initiatives in recent years, with roughly one-quarter of those resulting in a victory for the activists. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent these movements will grow in scope and how they will maintain connections with each other and with the NGO sector.

VII. Meet the Activists: Personal Stories, Motivations, Purposes, Self-Descriptions

– When we are silent, government thinks we agree, which is not the case. This is why I decided to speak out, to act.
(Activist, 37, Yerevan)

This and the subsequent chapters present the analysis of the qualitative data collected through interviews and focus group discussions with leaders and members of civic initiatives and NGOs, as well as non-activists. The terms civic initiative and activist campaigns are used interchangeably throughout the chapter.

7.1. Getting Involved

We begin by presenting the activists through their own eyes. The interviewees and discussion participants were asked to elaborate on personal experiences with regard to life-stories on how they became involved, their reasons for doing so, their motivation and the impact that participation had on their lives. It is interesting to note that the largest volume of data concerns activists’ personal experiences, which shows that people like to talk about themselves the most.

Activists’ reasons for becoming engaged range from the educational and professional, to social media involvement, to the lack of institutional culture. For some, evidence of an injustice

and the resulting burning need to follow up for a change was a significant factor and the most commonly cited reason for some leading activists to become initially involved. The majority of activists refer to their previous educational, professional or volunteering experience, which helped them to engage. For the majority of participants, the road to activism was paved by their educational involvement. Many of the present-day activists started their journey while completing their degrees in social, political, or legal studies or journalism. Engagement for some activists began as a result of their prior NGO involvement: being a staff member at an NGO was an opportunity to learn and develop some activist qualities. Here, it is important to mention that one of the discussions with activists was ultimately a discussion with NGO members, as the majority of participants (apart from their activist engagement) worked at NGOs.

When speaking of particular initiatives, such as Dem Em, the activists became engaged due to their occupation in the IT sector. In one account a journalist doing her job ended up becoming a part of the campaign.

“It started when I went to provide the coverage of one initiative as a journalist. But I am a very bad journalist. From the second gathering of the initiative I was no longer a journalist. I was an activist, and a part of the initiative.” Activist, Female, 28

Our interviews made it clear that social media is an important recruitment platform. Some activists became involved as a result of learning about a gathering/discussion via social media to discuss a concern. For several people, this scenario was how they originally engaged, which reconfirms the importance of public discourse around an issue (which will be elaborated on below). The lifeless political party environment and the lack of institutions capable of solving accumulating problems are further important driving forces behind people’s decisions to engage in activist behaviour.

Some activists became involved as a result of their individual stories of being cheated or deprived of something. A previously observed injustice at workplaces, discriminatory and unfair behaviour by bosses, an inability to make one’s point heard and the similar scenarios were mentioned as reasons. An injustice encountered during a personal/professional experience led people to become more demanding of the human rights protections and the public good. Their internal motivation has thus been primarily concerned with a sense of injustice, supported by a continuous sense of grief and misery. A valuable amount of data based on participants’ confessions demonstrates the existence of feelings fuelled by a motivation to engage. Had there been no such difficult experience, perhaps they would not have protested in the streets. When opportunities were presented to them (in terms of activist campaigns organised to address another injustice), these people chose to express their frustration by joining campaigns. One activist explains,

“The sense of loneliness is gone, because of my involvement. I was noticing problems, which are very hard to solve, close to impossible, which have been contributing to the

increase of feeling of loneliness. Now, when involved, I found out that I am not alone, and there are other likeminded people thinking about the problems the way I do. It is not a desert. The greatest impact has been getting exposed to the system of mutual support and encouragement. All the people I have known as a result of my involvement have become a system of mutual support, understanding and care. This has been the greatest change in my life.” Female, 35

It is essential to highlight a story of certain visible activists, whose involvement dates back to the sadly famous events of 1 March 2008. The 2008 presidential elections culminated in clashes (resulting in deaths) between supporters of Armenia’s first President, Levon Ter-Petrosyan (who decided to return to politics), and then-Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan’s regime forces. This became a starting point for some people to rethink the social and political situation facing the country. These developments paved the way for their activist manifestation. In the words of one activist,

“When people die one starts thinking about the reasons. Thinking about the reasons which led to the events, was an important factor for my engagement into active public life.” Male, 28

For some, physical activism (defined as *on the street*) has been a gradual process supported by change in methods. For example, active physical participation in the campaigns was a result of previous incremental activities, such as signing petitions, being active on social media, writing complaint letters and so forth. Hence, being a part of different initiatives helps people to develop new methods and skills for future resistance. Moreover, participation has a contaminating nature: being a part of one initiative facilitates joining others. People seem to become attached to whatever is happening.

For Armenian region-based activists, the fact of being from another region in itself contributed to becoming active citizens. Their communities were passive and lacked participation, and thus, they decided to take the lead. The visibility of Yerevan-based campaigns served as triggers for many region-based citizens to pursue such activity and led to region-based activism transformation.

In speaking of particular campaign-involvement experience, some active participants admit that their engagement was conditioned by a factor of immediate consequence that would result from a new policy change. For example, in the Maternity Leave campaign, there were participants who joined simply because they planned to become mothers, and this was an important issue for them. Some other participants noted that while protesting, other people walking nearby would approach them and ask whether they were expecting. Thus, there is a public perception of protesters being opposed to a certain policy because the policy would have a direct effect on them. In one activist’s words,

“People would approach me and ask if I am expecting. And it was the moment when I started to realise there is a problem in our society. We are very much concentrated on our own self. The notion of “whatever is happening outside, I don’t care as long as my family is fine” has a destructive nature for the wellbeing of the whole society. The “as long as I am fine, I don’t care about the rest” approach has been the main reason for all the wrongdoings in our country. The indifference towards whatever happens outside of your family is the main reason for today’s lack of proper management on the country level.” Female, 37

The personal stories of activists reveal the importance of understanding social, political, and economic developments. The involvement comes with understanding, while understanding comes with knowledge. Understanding the way things work results in participation because it is impossible to be indifferent to continuous injustices. A considerable number of environmental activists and journalists actively engaged with initiatives because they had closely examined the issues and understood the consequences of, for example, environmental damages to their family and friends who live in the target mining communities.

Throughout data collection period, an interesting line of discussion emerged with a particular focus on the motivations of people joining various campaigns. Some participants criticise those activists who became involved as a result of governmental policies having a direct effect on their family budget, advancing the argument that activism should not prioritise personal concerns but the public benefit. The criticism goes even further to complaints that such behaviour leads to decisions of which campaigns to join and which to ignore (perceived as a negative consequence). However, a healthy confession on behalf of those who admit their involvement resulted strictly from having ties with the issue (it having a direct financial effect on them) revolves around an important factor that their involvement (regardless the original reason for it) contributed to their development as true citizens.

The involvement of Diaspora members generally began in the same way. Upon their arrival in Armenia, they did not have, nor did they seek, any political affiliation. They did not support any political party, in power or otherwise. However, over the course of their life in Armenia, upon noticing numerous injustices and the unfair methods by which the system operates, they decided to engage. Many Diaspora Armenians became involved in this way. For many of them, becoming a part of the resistance was inevitable and not joining was simply out of the question.

Activism affects the lives of people and develops qualities in them. These qualities range from confidence and tolerance to acquiring of friends and popularity, but there are also some negative effects, such as having less time to spend with family.

Being active increases confidence and certainty in all aspects of life. Activism also teaches some tolerance, in terms of continued resistance directed at an eventual change. The availability of new friends was also mentioned as a change in involved people’s lives. However, activism does not only entail acquiring friends but also losing friends. As a result of engagement

people, change their thinking, risking the possibility of no longer agreeing with the thinking of former friends.

The impact for some ambitious (but admired) activists has been becoming very popular and therefore now feeling responsible for what they post on social media, given the huge numbers of followers they have. Additional responsibility, manifested in exercising control over one's online behaviour has an impact on these peoples' lives. As a result of activist campaigns, they are now recognised in public, a development that entails both positive and negative results because of the considerable responsibility that results from being popular. One becomes responsible for the people and society at large.

Having less time for family members, relatives and friends is another outcome of a life of extensive activism. Overall, the impact on life is that, for many, life can be divided into two periods, namely, before and after they became involved. This means that involvement entails considerable change and leaves an undeniable impact on the lives of activists. In the words of a 32-year-old female activist,

“My involvement has changed my way of thinking; it has broken stereotypes. For example, in Armenia, there is this stereotype that female shall not be on the street protesting, not to mention to close the street for a struggle purpose. I have done it. My involvement and participation have broken such stereotypes in my thinking.”

7.2. What Is Civic Activism?

Among other objectives, through this project, we sought to understand what civic activism means to activists. How do they understand, define and describe it? We received a wealth of diverse answers, opinions, and perceptions. This section of the chapter is an attempt to synthesise activists' understandings and definitions in a systematic manner, with the aim of producing a preliminary typology based on their answers.

The answers are grouped under chronological categories of a person's development cycle resulting from involvement in activism. The stages include the development of consciousness, followed by the development of behaviour, which results in certain performances (such as methods and techniques), leading to an end-result defined as outcomes and impact. Activism is a process that forms a citizen and influences society at large, starting from the development of personal qualities, leading to the transformation of behaviour, resulting in performance measures and, finally, societal impact. A description of each stage is presented below. Respondents' reflections on personal understandings and definitions of activism are grouped into the four sections described below; the concept is understood in one or several of the following personal development stages:

Stage 1: Personal development

Stage 2: Behavioural development

Stage 3: Methods of action, performance

Stage 4: Outcome and impact

Stage 1: Personal Development

The phenomenon called *activism* starts from an understanding of belonging to a society in chorus while becoming a person who cares about (or is not indifferent towards) surrounding developments. The *belonging to society* stage starts from an understanding of fundamental rights and freedoms. Understanding constitutional rights is imperative and a precondition for any deliberation over the definition of *activism*. Understanding constitutional rights is what differentiates *an activist citizen* from *just citizen with a passport*. Hence, activism has to be directly related to and viewed from the perspective of education. In its initial phase, it is the process of knowledge accumulation and the development of self-consciousness, which brings with it a demand for higher standards of life, defined as justice and rule of law. Stemming from the same argument, there will be little room for uneducated individuals, or those with limited knowledge, to advocate for importance of the public good. Activism at this stage concerns understanding the importance of waging an educated battle, based on verified information, research and analysis.

The more people learn, the more they will demand a better life, and they will also be prepared to struggle for a system to function properly; this is especially true under authoritarian regimes. This process of a constant longing or desire to learn more constitutes civic activism, whereby an activist is a conscious citizen prepared to challenge people or institutions attempting to violate human rights.

Stage 2: Behavioural development

Civic activists constitute the stratum of population who not only know their rights but are also courageous enough to defend them. The culmination of the first stage of development leads to a change in behaviour. The change of behaviour is manifested in the performance of a certain plan of actions, based on an awareness of rights and duties, as well as a readiness to raise issues of public importance in support of a general cause. The behaviour shift is also linked to the understanding that participation in elections alone (as a means of raising public voice) is absolutely insufficient. It is a change of behaviour intended to make the activist permanently engaged in public affairs. Activists start advocating for a cause in the public interest.

An important dimension of this stage of development further includes the behaviour shift resulting in activities outside of a person's specialisation, occupation or formal affiliation. It becomes a responsibility to contribute to the public benefit, not necessarily due to a professional duty or during working hours.

Stage 3: Methods of action, performance

The development of the second stage inevitably results in the application of certain methods or techniques to make the behaviour shift tangible. The understanding of activism in its third stage primarily concerns the concept of participation, which is divided into online and offline participation. While the overwhelming majority views the phenomenon as occurring on the

street, activism can take different forms and include a range of methods of resistance, including the analysis of policies or circumstances.

Activism is engagement in the economic, political or social life of a country. An example of this stage is participation in the budgetary process. For instance, it is the struggling to put a mechanism in place that will allow public participation in the decision-making processes over drafting a budget (an essential aspect of public affairs). An ordinary citizen with no affiliation should participate in hearings over the drafting of a budget. The methods and means employed on the way to achieving one's purpose refer to this stage of performance development.

A frequent subject in the debate on definitions of activism concerns whether it presupposes a struggle in favour of a beneficial purpose. Do we know that something is activism because the cause is justified? Some argue that this is the case, while others disagree. The argument is that something becomes 'activism' whenever a group of people take a consequent plan of actions to achieve a goal, no matter its cause.

Every person or organisation chooses the level of involvement and methods to employ. Therefore, it is difficult to arrive at a single definition. The concept is rather expressed as a matter of visibility: if one's actions are invisible to the community, then it is not activism. To observe the true meaning at work, it is essential that specific techniques be applied that result in societal impact and social change.

Stage 4: Outcome and impact

The most popular definition of activism generated as a result of this study is *change*. If the first three stages are successfully completed, a change will occur, which is defined as impact. The description of the concept in its last stage of development is synonymous with an end-result or an outcome, advancement or progress, the achievement or change per se. Such development is a product of collective reactions to governmental policy-making, which is transformed due to continuous impulses conveyed to the public by activists. Activists act as bridges for progress, linking the detached public to the government by raising issues necessitating attention before the latter can develop into disasters.

Taking responsibility for the well-being of a community, as expressed in physical participation, influences larger processes. Activism is impact and a process leading a country to development.

As a part of a state-building process, civic activism should be approached under the constitutional framework, with each constituent (citizen) having to play his or her part in it.

Table 4 presents typologies developed based on participants' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs with regard to activism (defined in words or phrases).

Table 4 Civic activism typologies

<i>Personal development (Consciousness)</i>	<i>Behavioural development (Action)</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - education; - accumulation of knowledge; - self-consciousness; - raise of consciousness towards claims; - decision not to be indifferent; - civic self-development; - self-esteem development; - sense of waking up from within; - understanding own rights and duties; - appreciation of things; - understanding the importance of making decision/taking position; - mentality change; - dissidence; - development of social responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participation; - speaking out, raising concerns; - defending human rights; - disobedience; - peaceful resistance; - change in manners; - engagement in economic and political life; - system of continued activities; - act of defending public interest; - pointing to issues left out from governmental agenda; - informing public about changes in public policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contribution to society; - state-building; - research and analysis; - public display; - visibility; - a way of life; - independence

One of the main topics of disagreement is whether activism is a permanently cherished condition and public behaviour or if there is instead a need for it only in response to governmental wrongdoing. The overwhelming majority of participants approach the concept through the prism of a *problem*. There are issues to be resolved, which is why activism will be visible in a society. If there are no problems, there will be no activism and no need for it. In other words, activism *happens* whenever something goes wrong. People stand up to defend their rights when they are violated. In the words of a participant, “*If conditions in a country are ideal, there is no need for activism.*” Activist, Female, 31

Activism is therefore understood as a reaction to certain developments. However, there is an opposing opinion that is in favour of *activism* as a normal condition (as opposed to a reaction) that should be maintained whether under a democracy or a dictatorship. Regardless of conditions, *activism* means responsible citizens who constitute the core of a country (even one with no problems). Activism is therefore understood as a reality outside governmental activities. It is not a matter of demanding things from the government but rather of being a good citizen. It is a person who is vigilant in caring about his or her community. There are no problems because of responsible citizens and a constantly vigilant society. Being responsible is a condition that is developed over time, a habit on the basis of which a society progresses and registers no problems. Being reactionary, therefore, is not enough.

Similar deliberation over the divergence of opinions was a recurring subject throughout the discussions and led the discourse to another level. Is it a functioning democracy that leads to

public activism (because, in a true democracy, the rule of law allows people to freely voice concerns)? Or is it a non-democratic society that inevitably develops activism and leads to development? Are vigilant societies able to maintain order in a non-democratic setting, or is it an already established democracy that educates and provides space for participation? Which of the two comes first thus serves as a theoretical point of departure, before considering some practical examples, based on the Armenian reality.

For the majority of activists and NGO members, activism would be unnecessary if a country operated based on democratic principles. This argument is developed by placing Armenia's experience in focus. There would be no rising activism were it not for the wrongdoings, defined as partisan decision-making and corruption. Because the majority of problems in Armenia stem from political causes, they eventually resonate with every citizen. Activism in Armenia develops because citizens are not content with the economic, political or social decision-making of the country. For the majority of participants, activism in Armenia is synonymous with 'protest' and should be happening 'outside', as people observe fewer opportunities for change via other methods of resistance.

VIII. Civic Activism and Political Culture

– Having a passport does not mean being a citizen. (Activist, 31, Yerevan)

8.1. Political Culture in Armenia

According to the activists' perceptions, Armenia has a typical post-Soviet political culture, and there are number of factors to support this argument. The main and unfortunate components are the considerable disconnect between the public and the government; extremely limited public participation in decision-making processes; the lack of an independent judiciary and a system of checks and balances; the monopolistic cycle of systemic corruption and failed political parties. The lack of two important and interrelated factors, namely trust and dialogue, contributes to the present detachment between the public and the government. Because there is no trust, there is no dialogue. The underdeveloped culture of discourse might serve as a source of detachment and distrust within the society. Debates facilitate the emergence of truth, and it is precisely the lack of such debates and deliberations that hinders healthy institutional functioning. Once a culture of debate develops, trust will follow.

Increased civic participation in decision-making processes is crucial. People not only have to be involved, but importantly, they must also understand that they form a part of the process and have an impact. To contribute to the deliberative culture in Armenian society, changes in this regard are crucial.

There is consensus among the participants regarding the interplay between formal institutions and informal activism. Because of the lack of a healthy democratic political culture,

civic activism is on the rise. The difference between formal institutions and informal activism is that government has been successful in controlling the system in terms of enforcing its rules and overseeing procedures, accruing to the benefit of the ruling administration. The corrupt system has functioned successfully because all branches of government operate together and are heavily controlled by authorities. By contrast, it is difficult for the government to control civic initiatives. The authorities attempt to exercise such control, but it is difficult because an initiative has many participants, who are all different people, and enforcing control over each person takes time and is therefore not always feasible.

The justice system is an important element of the political culture of a given society. Armenia has succeeded at proclaiming independence as a country, but it has failed at implementing a proper functioning of checks and balances based on an independent judiciary. All power holders and sectors are intertwined, which leads to a single, large and corrupt system of governance. Breaking the corrupt cycle of continued favours and dependencies would be an improvement with effects spreading to development in many sectors. Much of the criticism for the existence of a poor political culture is directed at the government, which is believed to set the rules and is thus responsible for developing the culture. The existing rules are, regrettably, considered to be nothing other than a pure profit-making, namely, a typical post-Soviet oligarchic system operating in a profit-based political culture, with actors seeking personal gains and developing a systemic monopoly.

The political culture is poor because even the political parties are formed and operate based not on ideologies but profits. The political parties lack certain crucial qualities, such as a culture of debate and cooperation. Therefore, the political culture will only become what it must be once a constitutional order is established in the country, an order serving its people, not the ruling few.

8.1.1 Political Culture and Activism

In fairness, some other existing components of Armenia's political culture have to be recognised. There is overwhelming agreement that the only sphere capable of creating development is the civic sphere, as it experiences sparks of development from within. These sparks are visible in the systematic non-violent resistance observed over the course of the last ten years.

The developing activism is a bright aspect of what, at times, is the very dark reality of Armenia. For many participants, it is the only hope for change and, generally, the sole approach to help address illegal behaviour. The public is characterised by a desire to become involved. The recent experience of civic initiatives is an indication of this desire and readiness to demand, with an overall maturity of protest and a real change (stemming from it) yet to come.

As outlined in the previous section, when defining activism, many refer to a variety of methods and activities. When an attempt is made to apply the concept to Armenian reality, activism becomes an action that necessarily comes from the outside. Activism in Armenia is seen as happening on the street because this is the only way to achieve the actors' goals. Due to the

lack of political will on the part of the authorities, people resort to peaceful resistance in the streets, hoping to win there.

Despite policies sparking public disagreement, the Armenian population has become more demanding. The desire and potential of the people are thus in check. There is a lack of change on a larger scale; a trigger to marry these two components (desire and potential), to create a greater impact, will be to develop trust. There is a lack of public trust in the possibility of change. The general public has little confidence that tangible change is possible and that achieving such change depends on them. While this argument is true for older people (who succeeded in eliminating the Soviet Union 25 years ago but still feel disappointed in the capitalist version of society), it does not hold among the youth. The youth is characterised by spontaneity of action, increased participation and unity. A proven argument about Armenians is that they become united against an external attack. The most recent such example is what has become commonly referred to as the Karabakh four-day April war.³⁴

A lack of public information is ruinous for a culture of participation. As a result, minor issues that directly affect the population tend to mobilise large numbers of people, whereas greater issues that have an indirect effect (such as Armenia's joining the Russian's Eurasian Economic Union), receive limited feedback. Hence, Armenia's political culture is confused, and it seems that the time is not yet ripe for greater public participation and change. To achieve that aim, people hope that a civic initiative (advocating any cause) might develop into a massive political campaign. This is the reason that people are outside the system. In the words of a political activist: *"It seems that people in Armenia stand up for minor issues, whereas in reality they stand up for their dignity and pride."* Male, 57

8.1.2 Political Culture and NGOs

The NGO sector in Armenia is not generally treated seriously. This is a sad consequence, but it has serious causes. Formal NGOs registered in Armenia do not strive to develop a political culture through coordinated efforts. NGOs in Armenia have a very specific focus on particular issues, whereas for NGOs to become a part of the whole and unite different organisations around the same vision, aiming at a real change, an associative culture has to be developed.

There are some real organisations that deliver results. However, these are few and cannot possibly address the problems affecting a wide array of issues, not to mention a crisis. There is a perception that NGOs are financially and politically dependent (as a result of the existing political culture), which is why their capacities are limited in terms of participation and independent performance in general. Thus, the popular criticism of NGOs as supporters of external donors' agendas persists, negatively influencing their image and reputation. Unfortunately, few people seek to identify alternative means of sustaining formal entities in the absence of internal funding channels.

³⁴ In early April 2016, as a result of escalating conflict, Armenians exhibited unprecedented support by volunteering and organising to send items of support to the frontline. (The war escalated during the writing of this study).

However, regardless of how harsh the reality may appear, NGOs should take public perceptions into consideration and develop policies accordingly. To regain respect, they have to develop a strategy of delivering serious input to create changes in the system of governance. Developing capacities to engage in policy-making processes, as well as monitoring policy implementation, could be a new avenue for engagement, especially given the forthcoming change to Armenia's political structures under the new Constitution.

The majority of participants believe that to have a greater impact, NGOs should start delivering the message that the public is the main decision maker. The inclusion of such a strategy on their agenda will provide considerable support for all groups and might even help to increase the level of public trust in NGOs.

There are organisations that join in activist campaigns and offer their resources and potential. Thus, although NGOs do not hinder any civic processes, their contribution to them is not substantial. Their impact could be greater if they were to devote greater effort to making the public the main target in their critical missions.

Regarding the factors differentiating civic initiatives from NGOs, individuals participating in the former are free to raise various issues, even radical ones like altering the system of governance and leadership, while NGOs are doomed to seek cooperation with authorities to promote the specific agendas they have in their field of operation. Thus, activists are much more flexible, while a perception exists there are things that NGOs cannot do or do not attempt.

8.1.3. Non-Participation Culture

The discussions with non-activists were very interesting, in terms of shedding light on some existing problems hindering public participation, through the participants' personal experiences. The lack of trust in the potential for change, the lack of information, the sense of fear and the sense of being deceived are among the most frequently mentioned arguments, which are supported by examples.

The main reason for not participating is the lack of confidence that anything might change. The majority of participants have their own stories of developing a sense of disappointment in the notion of societal progress in terms of equality and justice. Many non-activists highlight their own experience, whether at their workplaces, personal business establishments or other spaces, of encountering barriers that led them to dismiss the possibility of trust and hope for change. The aggressive and corrupt system is seen as impossible to change, which is why they do not find any substantial reason to participate. According to many non-activist 'disbelievers', once a person attempts to speak out against an injustice, all doors are closed against them, and the opportunities are lost.

However, many non-activists also admit the reality of a lack of information, which they also consider a cause of lower trust and participation. There is a lack of information within society and thus a lack of participation. In the words of a non-activist from Yerevan,

“As a non-participant to any protest, I usually join torchlight processions,³⁵ and I will tell why. Because I know why I go there, why it has been organised, what is its reason and what the outcome will be. While one doesn’t know anything about the protests: who the organisers are, who it is being financed by, even if you learn, one can never be sure. You become a marionette in the hands of others, who have some plans to implement by engaging a lot of youth. I know a lot of people who simply join protests for the sake of entertainment. I think, only about ten per cent of people who join know why they are there.” Male, 25

When asked about reasons not to participate, some of the non-activists refer to the 70 years of Soviet experience when people would be forced to spend the rest of their lives in exile, in Siberia, after attempting to speak out. This indicates that the fear still exists. Certain stereotypes remain a considerable hindrance even to some young representatives who, might be surrounded by many older people in their homes. *“In order to go against something, I need very serious reasons and guarantees.”* Non-Activist, Female, 29

Similarly, some tell stories of being deceived by a previous participation experience. For example, after attending a meeting organised by a political party, one person found that the organisers simply needed the public for the sake of visibility and numbers. *“...After that I realised nothing is worthy. Every gathering needs its constituents for the sake of exercising an existence, a visibility, really, of public support.”* Male, 27

New methods of involvement and struggle are being demanded. Non-activists highlight that they might join various initiatives if there were new, creative methods. Because the initiatives are generally limited to protests on the street, many abstain from participating. Referring to Electric Yerevan, some mention that, for example, it might have been more productive if the public had started to not use electricity as a demonstration of being against the policy, instead of going and shouting on the street. In the words of a non-activist, *“I do not participate, because I don’t think that standing, holding posters or shouting will bring any change.”* Male, 22

It seems that among non-activists, there is a demand for new, non-violent and creative methods of resistance.

8.1.4. How to Improve

Civic activism is an important element of a country’s political culture. However, its primary importance lies in the extent to which it can exert an impact. To succeed in having an impact, it is important for activist campaign to a) cooperate with different groups within society; b) develop communication and outreach techniques; c) be open and transparent; d) enrich knowledge of methods of peaceful resistance; and d) exercise perfect portfolios for public to engage.

³⁵ Organised annually on the Twenty-fourth of April to commemorate the Armenian Genocide.

Any change has to be coordinated among a number of constituents and should include various groups. This should involve not only local activists and NGOs but also international organisations, Diaspora members, and embassies, among other actors. It is only via the inclusion of different social groups that it is possible to achieve a tangible result. Establishing cooperation with different bodies and bringing international attention in focus will contribute to the seriousness of campaigns.

To be successful in approaching various groups of people, it will be important for activist groups to develop the art of communication using language accessible to everyone. It is the lack of a *message* that prevents human potential from being utilised in larger activist campaigns.

To achieve this, activists need to learn to apply the art of outreach and communication to larger and different layers of population, as well as the art of gathering particular people around particular concerns. It is important for potential groups of the population to be viewed as stakeholders of specific issues. Activists should match vulnerable groups to existing problems.

Conspiracy theories and assumptions lead political culture down the wrong path and challenge open discourse and transparency. In an environment of distrust, people require sincere communication and explanations. Activists should be open about their resources and means to avoid any suspicion of being financed by certain groups and thus serving certain interests. Such sincerity and transparency should serve as tools to mobilise and awaken the public. Sincerity offers considerable potential for success and should be wielded in service of positive change. People are in need of a sincere dialogue based on reason and analysis.

The importance of enquiring after new methods of peaceful resistance should never be underestimated. The Armenian public should be introduced to new methods of engagement because there is a risk that the general perceptions of civic activism are limited to the art of protest and disobedience on the street, while it is much more than that. It is not only a matter of protesting; rather, it involves developing skills and strategies for a better and informed involvement.

It is of similar importance for the leaders and organisers of activist campaigns to have credentials that indicate that they are fulfilled and educated persons. The public should recognise that a person struggling against an injustice is successful in their professional and personal life, among other aspects. This has the potential to increase opportunities for mobilisation and lead the public to believe in the possibility of a successful result.

To create a better future, civic activism has to be further prioritised and developed. It is the civic culture that will be able to shape the agenda of the country, which it partly already does. Because activism is such a valued element of present political culture, it would be beneficial if government authorities were to apply some of activist qualities.

8.2. Civic Initiatives in Armenia

There is agreement among many participants that the words “initiative”, “campaign” or “movement” do not exactly represent what is happening in Armenia. The words that would best describe the on-going cases are “struggle” or “battle”³⁶.

One of the most visible traits assigned to initiatives is spontaneity. Civic initiatives are of a non-political nature and are instead case-driven or issue-specific, which is why initiatives do not tend to last long and do not develop into larger movements. There is also a commonly held view that some of the successful initiatives of the past have inspired numerous other initiatives. In other words, initiatives usually develop based on similar past cases, in the sense that nearly identical groups of people organise and join future initiatives. Most of the activists know each other and join initiatives for different purposes. This indicates the strength of the internal connections among activists, an argument which is true for the major cities of Armenia, including Yerevan, Gyumri and Kapan.

It should be noted that many participants have serious reservations about the terms “civic activist” or “activism”. There seems to be general agreement that these terms possess negative connotations, a phenomenon interestingly linked to the Armenian government, which has succeeded in spreading a negative image, thereby creating ill reputation about the initiatives and discouraging participation in them. According to the findings of a previous study on civil society in Armenia, a similar tendency can be observed in the perception of NGOs as entities spreading external agendas, as opposed to being a contribution to the local society (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014). At present, the focus of attention has shifted on activists, with a similar logic and reasoning. Activists in Armenia participate and engage using their own time and resources.

There is an interesting tendency at present regarding pressures and control exerted on behalf of the government. Some interviewees highlight similar stories of being pressured to leave campaigns. Those activists who happen to have relatives or friends working in the public sector often receive a call requesting (followed by a demand) that they withdraw from participation in an initiative, in an effort to persuade them to leave the campaign. The threatening arguments used to support such demands usually revolve around issues of safety and security, elaborating that they can still be saved from pressures and further conflicts with the authorities, if they quit the initiative immediately.

8.2.1. How Do Civic Initiatives Succeed?

The success of a civic initiative is a uniting factor in itself. For example, Armenia has witnessed some important success stories, which are regarded as starting points that can be echoed in future initiatives.³⁷ The successful past cases contributed to the success of other initiatives. For example, people joined the Dem Em or the Electric Yerevan initiatives because they knew that they would be a success. However, others consider such achievements to be minor. The

³⁶ In Armenian «սլաքսաք»

³⁷ Frequent reference points in this context are two successful initiatives: *Save Mashtots park* (the preservation of a national park) and *We Are Paying 100 Dram* (an issue concerning public transportation price hike).

overarching idea behind this thinking is that people need to struggle for a greater idea instead of changing the price of a service. The public needs to strive for greater achievements because minor successes help the authorities to distract the public from major issues. The success of one initiative leads to the success of others because people become inspired and increase their confidence.

The following factors make an initiative a success. The most important factor for the success of any initiative is unity. Whether in planning a strategy, developing decisions, or addressing minor issues, unity has to prevail in internal dynamics if the initiative seeks success. Unity and cooperation among team members is essential. There must be high levels of confidence and trust in each other such that any member is able to speak out on the street, at a press-conference or in other public settings; other members should be certain that a common opinion has been voiced, in accordance with mutual agreement. The unity argument was raised as the best means of ensuring bonding among the most active participants in the second-largest city of Armenia, Gyumri, which has registered a number of successful cases of public opinion triumphing over governmental decision-making at the local level. The ability to unite around important values based on societal benefit as opposed to personal gains is thus essential.

Another success factor concerns the leaders and organisers of initiatives. The fact that people tend to know others in their communities facilitates mobilisation and therefore contributes to the success of initiatives. There is transparency in this regard, meaning that everyone knows the background and involvement of others. This helps in organising and advocating a concern. People know who they can trust and who might turn their back on them.

Activists and the core leaders of some visible campaigns also frequently mentioned the importance of a sense of responsibility. Activists having mobilised numbers of people, feel responsible for those people; the former then feel that they cannot simply leave. The sense of responsibility towards those who have joined a campaign is a driving force for success. Another factor is the ability to avoid repeating past mistakes and to instead develop creative alternatives. The ability to change and apply new strategies within campaign in the struggle against an injustice leads to success.

A successful initiative is also characterised by the fact that many people start making enquiries about the concern raised by the activists. For example, many initiatives were able to include members of Diaspora, who may have been visiting Armenia for a short period of time. They became involved in an initiative because the core group was able to reach out to them and various groups within the local and international population. Therefore, being able to raise awareness about concerns is a tool that promotes the success of a given initiative.

The last, but not least important, factor is the number of people involved. The physical turnout is a clear indication of the ability to change government behaviour. The more people are mobilised, the more cautiously the authorities will act. This means that the number of people that an initiative is able to mobilise will be a determining factor of whether it will become a success or a failure.

8.2.2. Why Do Civic Initiatives Fail?

In contrast to the potential for success when there is common consensus and a general sense of unity among campaign participants, disagreement among campaign organisers over how to proceed with certain issues can lead to the failure of a campaign. When a group encounters a multiplicity of opinions on how to lead an initiative, on which demands to prioritise, or on how to frame them, this can lead to failure. Although incompatible with certain qualities of democratic participation, whereby a range of opinions serves to promote success, the majority of interview participants believe that the divergence of opinions among initiative leaders is a hindrance that will undoubtedly lead to failure. They apply a similar line of argument, when disagreements are fuelled by the public, not necessarily by core team members. A common scenario in this regard is when groups of people join a campaign and then promote the issues that they each prioritise. Activists thus face pressure to choose between adding new issues demanded by the public to their agenda and reorienting their original strategy for struggle. Here, it is important to realise that if an initiative has too many goals to fulfil, many might not realise. This was in part the scenario that played out during Electric Yerevan, with new participants emerging and advancing more ambitious demands that diverged from the issues that the initiative had originally mobilised to promote. To achieve success, the goals of initiatives have to be clearly framed for and well understood by the public at large. Similarly, there will be considerable potential for campaign failure if one group (either activists or NGOs) refuses to cooperate with others. A lack of mutual agreement between the two groups will most likely lead to campaign failure. Confusion over the aims of the initiative (or changes in aims) and the ways in which concerns are going to be addressed will hinder the longevity of the initiative.

Most civic initiatives ultimately fail because there is no intergenerational exchange of experience. The older generation had successful activism experience (mostly with respect to the Karabakh movement's success). Hence, they have qualities they could be transferred to their children. Unfortunately, however, there is no visible enthusiasm for doing so among the older population; this has a negative influence on the youth, who are ready to develop in this regard. The younger population needs to be exposed to the details of past successful experience in mobilisation to be able to avoid repeating the mistakes of the older generation and to instead apply previously successful skills to current practice.

8.2.3. The Role of Social Media

The role of social media cannot be underestimated. The most popular social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter, have been useful for mobilising in Armenia. Both platforms should remain important tools in future mobilisations because traditional media is governmentally centralised, and one thus cannot expect much from it. In fact, some leading civic activists have become popular thanks to social media. On a humorous note, an activist highlights that *“Writing a status online has become a writing genre. Male, 37*

Explanations of such popularity are usually limited to confessions by activists that it was not originally their aim to become popular (when they created a social media profile). However, they ultimately became popular because the platform provided such an opportunity.

Regarding the damaging role of social media, in terms of encouraging slacktivism instead of physical activism, one participant highlights, *“From time to time we would say, ‘...the revolution is not going to be broadcasted. Get out of the social media, and come out on the street..!’”* Activist, Male, 25

8.2.4. Civic Initiatives: How to Improve?

It is important for civic initiatives to promote their agendas through carefully planned and accurate cooperation with the media. Any initiative should be able to communicate its core messages to a larger audience. In Armenia, the traditional media remain still popular, and therefore a large segment of the population cannot be accessed solely via social media. To ensure better outreach to the population, initiatives should have an effective strategy to make their points heard.

Moreover, to be successful, activists have to develop healthy critical thinking based on evidence, as opposed to emotions and blind disagreement with authorities. Concerns have to be framed and addressed in an educated way, supported by research. Only then will it be possible to achieve tangible results. Struggles based on emotions, anecdotal evidence and mere disagreement are just trump cards in the hands of the ruling few. Civil society can and should do better than that. In the words of an activist,

“Civic initiatives in Armenia need a well-designed strategy, clarity of purpose, precise tactics, communication channels, and consolidated decisions. These are the tools which will lead to success. The tools are there. We just need to make appropriate use of them. We need to use them.” Male, 37

The study participants are of the opinion that public’s sole hope for change rests with civic uprising; other traditional or official channels are ineffective, either due to a lack of political will, or a variety of barriers which even the ruling administration is incapable to overcome.

“Serious politicians approach us with a serious face and say ‘you should raise the issue of President’s withdrawal’... It was almost funny to realise they approach a civic initiative with such a purpose, when he happens to be an experienced politician, with many years of political experience behind [him]. Today they approach an initiative which is organised simply to fight against a service delivery issue. How bad the situation of a country must be, when the people attach their hope to initiatives, which do not represent an institutional body, do not have any funding, and simply join the struggle after 6 PM.” Activist, Male, 28

IX. Perceptions

9.1. Activist Perceptions of NGOs

It is difficult to derive a single, overarching description of activists' perceptions of the formal non-governmental entities currently operating in Armenia. The perceptions vary from very positive to extremely negative, with all the categories in between having substantial support.

Regarding perceptions of NGOs in Armenia's current context, it is essential to categorise and differentiate among the types of organisations in terms of their impact. There are numerous registered organisations in Armenia: 4,499 public organisations (NGOs) as of July 1 2016.³⁸ This figure includes diverse organisations, ranging from NGOs with zero impact, to some that make limited contributions to their immediate communities, and to a few organisations working for societal impact. Due to the multiplicity of organisations, a discussion of perceptions of NGOs can only be effective if the NGOs are first classified in detail. Similarly, perceptions vary with respect to the specific category of NGOs concerned.

According to many activists, most organisations have either no or little impact for society and are therefore associated with negative perceptions. NGOs are of no help; it is the activist campaigns that deliver change. NGOs' role has become secondary in the republic, if visible at all. Activist groups do not take NGOs seriously, as they believe that more can be achieved via informal measures than with the aid of formal entities. Negative perceptions outweigh positive ones and stem from the following general reasons: finances, participation in protests, the aim of an organisation's advocacy (or struggle) and organisational missions.

According to many activists, NGOs cannot produce real change. These organisations are accustomed to spending considerable resources for purposes that are little known to the public. The limited available information on how funds are spent is an important reason for the low level of trust in NGOs among activists. NGOs are public organisations, but there are few signs that they engage in work on behalf of the public. To increase trust and impact, their work should be tangible and visible to the public; however, NGOs generally engage in activities behind closed doors. This behaviour sows suspicion and distrust.

Some critical observations regarding NGOs' operations were reported by several activists who were engaged due to patriotic aspirations. Their scepticism becomes even more tangible when NGOs advocate for the rights of LGBT people, for example. Here, for areas traditionally associated with patriotic sentiments, the clash, or contradiction was between issues regarded as having a 'Western tendency' as opposed to being human rights issues.

Another reason for the negative perceptions of NGOs is the lack of clarity in NGO missions. People are not always aware of what NGOs main organisational missions are, what exactly they struggle for, and what they tend to achieve.

³⁸ Source: www.justice.am

According to some activists, NGOs are proactive, leader-centred, and in disarray. Some believe that there is much greater potential to use volunteering to make change in Armenian society than with NGOs, whereas NGOs should serve as a bridge between the public and government. Only then can NGOs be useful.

Positive perceptions, although minor, are nevertheless visible thanks to the few organisations that attempt to operate to have a greater impact, notwithstanding barriers to better inclusion. Because the activists consider Armenian political parties as institutions to be thoroughly discredited, they believe that the non-governmental sector should be approached because it has the potential to advance public interests.

Activists who have positive attitudes about NGOs are characterised by having had prior or current experience of involvement with an organisation, experience that allowed them to develop into active citizens. NGOs are important for the success of activist campaigns, and the respondents mentioned specific examples of cooperation in addressing a common cause, for example the case of Teghut civic initiative.

The activists maintain that it is important for ‘real’ NGOs to support civic initiatives. Their inclusion will only result in positive perceptions. NGOs are beneficial for initiatives, as they can offer support by providing access to experts and seeking funding.

9.2. Activists on Public Perceptions of Civic Initiatives

The activists believe that Armenians generally support civic initiatives because the public has positive perceptions of the initiatives. These positive perceptions of informal methods of resistance are developed due to the Armenian public’s continual disappointments in recent years in terms of mobilisation and winning campaigns. The disappointments relate to a number of processes that exclude the potential for developing an alternative powerful political actor/s in the Armenian political arena. One such example is the sadly famous events of 2008, which witnessed the defeat of Armenia’s first President, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, in his attempt to return to politics. Further examples include the defeat of another presidential candidate, Raffi Hovhannisyán, in the 2013 elections due to the incapacity of the system to deliver fair elections, and the political pressure on Gagik Tsarukyan, the leader of the second-majority party in the Parliament, resulting in the Tsarukyan’s complete withdrawal from politics. All such events are characterised by a common factor, namely, a series of incremental advances ending in an overwhelming defeat for the newly rising power.

This is the primary reason that activists tend to characterise civic initiatives as the last means by which the people will ever win. The majority of participants in activist campaigns are youth, which is another reason for the persistently positive perceptions of the initiatives, as the youth are usually taking the lead and are able to actively participate. The young generation recognises the failure of the older population to challenge the authorities and deliver change. The youth also seem to recognise the incapacity of formal entities to deliver societal impact, which is another reason for the sustainable youth involvement in civic initiatives.

At times, the public regards activists as saviours. Some accounts indicate that the public feels that it lacks charismatic people who can speak in a highly literate language while also being accessible to all. Regarding the demand for leadership and the present detachment between the public and authorities, a 37-year-old female activist highlights the following:

“They were saying things to me like ‘you are our saviour’, and I replied ‘do you not understand that I am... just professional at my job, I am not here to do a revolution, I am here to unite us around an issue of injustice, and now I see what impact it has.’ And I understood the secret. They like me because I am one of them, similar to them. And I understood that all we need is a connecting link to unite the public with policy makers. It is nonsense that those who decide on the destiny of the public don’t have anything to do with this very public. I am certain we will be able to deliver success here, to understand why we have this disconnect, and establish the link.”

Some activists note that although positive public perceptions exist, they are not applied in practice. In other words, it would be much better if people were to support the initiatives regardless of subject matter. An example of such a lack of participation by the public is observed in the Maternity Leave initiative among the husbands of the pregnant women who were advocating for the issue. Another such example is a campaign against a policy for taxi drivers in Gyumri, which was able only to mobilise drivers without any visible participation by other groups. It is therefore important to examine the specifics of participation. The Electric Yerevan initiative was a major mobilisation because the issue affected everyone. Being overly selective in deciding to participate in campaigns is negatively affecting the culture of participation in Armenia.

However, there are examples of the public’s positive perceptions having a practical impact. For example, during the fortnight-long Electric Yerevan campaign, people brought food to support the protesters. Flyers were distributed during the Dem Em initiative. While people’s first reaction was “we are not interested”, regarding campaign flyers as just another advertising activity, but after they noticed the Dem Em logo on the paper, most people reacted by taking the flyer and saying that they would physically join the campaign.

In summary, activists tend to believe that civic initiatives represent the only institutions trusted by the public. They believe that the public’s perceptions are positive because people have come to understand the specifics of self-organisation. People began to self-organise thanks to civic initiatives. This is a very good opportunity for them to practice self-organisation, which leads to positive perceptions of and increased trust in initiatives.

9.3. NGO and Public Perceptions of Activists and Civic Initiatives

This section of the chapter examines civic activists from the perspectives of NGO leaders, NGO practitioners and a few representatives of the general (non-active) public we interviewed over the course of our research project.

Although some people attach a negative connotation to the very notion of being an activist or engaging in activism, the overall perceptions of and attitudes towards them are positive, trusting and welcoming. Civic initiatives are seen as breaking stereotypes in Armenia. The activism that has taken place in Armenia has proven that it is possible to make a civic contribution to decision-making on issues in a variety of sectors. To justify their responses, the majority of NGO leaders referred to specific campaigns that ended in success. Reflecting on activism in general, an NGO leader says, “...*We can nearly say that civic initiatives in Armenia somehow create the agenda along with the government today.*” Male, 31

Interestingly, the responses of NGO members reflect self-critical perceptions. There is a widely accepted notion that civic activists and initiatives do not wish to be associated with NGOs due to the latter’s negative reputation and public perceptions. Generally, NGOs advocate issues based on their grants, and thus perform according to donor instructions to promote a certain agenda. This is the public’s perception of NGOs, and this is why civic activists do not generally wish to have their performance be in any way associated with NGOs, as they refuse to have doubts cast on their legitimacy. In the words of an NGO member, “*Civic activists comprise sort of a progressive fraction of the public*” Female, 32

9.4. Public Perceptions of Female Activists

One particular aspect closely followed throughout the implementation of this study has been the gender dimension. Because of the developing activism visible in many major cities of Armenia, women’s participation and perceptions of this phenomenon have been of particular interest. Regrettably, the data generally reveal negative attitudes towards female participation in protests, a finding necessitating further enquiry.

A 32-year-old female activist mentions a time when a policeman approached her during a protest, saying “*You are a girl, and came to protest here. Do not do this. This is a shame.*” No such data were generated in relation to male participants.

The truly discouraging finding, however, does not concern the police forces, or even the public at large, but the attitudes of the male participants of the campaigns and the leaders of activist campaigns towards their female counterparts. Several female activists confess that while they were actively involved in the organisational activities of protests, whenever there was an opportunity to take on greater responsibility, such as speaking to public via microphone, the group would look for a man to accomplish it. Several female activists in the Electric Yerevan campaign relate occasions of male activists asking to them to stop going forward onto the barricades because they are either women or girls. Because they are female, they should stand behind the men, as it might be dangerous to occupy the first rows. This means that male activists,

and not just the public at large, have reservations about the idea of having female activists. Certain examples from the initiatives demonstrate that this issue may develop into a subject of discussion simply because of female involvement in the action. For example, a woman removing a policeman's hat is bad, not because of the act itself, but because it was done by a female, who should not behave in such a way and should instead act *"like a woman"* (Activist, Female, 28).

In Armenian society there is an unfortunate, if not ignorant, use of a notion of a *manly girl*,³⁹ which is generally the explanation for misunderstandings on many gender-related issues. This distorted notion has long existed and continues to be manifest in public in the present. In the words of a 23-year-old female activist:

"My friends and relatives treat me in the 'manly girl' framework. They think that if you are a woman, you need to be weak, whereas if you are active, it means you are a manly girl. This approach is paradoxical to me, and personally, I strive to change it."

Another example confirms the persistent cultural barriers to and distorted attitudes towards activism. An activist tells a story:

"A friend of ours is from one of the Gegharkunik Marz villages. Once people came to their house to 'take her as a bride' according to the still existing village tradition. After learning, during the dinner table conversations, that the girl is an activist, they left. They literally left the house. By the way, our friend is happy it didn't work out. And yes, the people who came were from Yerevan." Male, 26

Such problems that are generally believed to persist in peripheral areas of the country actually exist throughout the country. It is therefore difficult to conclude that longstanding, prevailing stereotypes relating to gender and women's role in society will wither away.

9.5. Relatives and Friends' Perceptions of Activists

Among other questions, we were interested in learning relatives and friends' perceptions of activists, as a specific group within society, as they are personally related to the target unit of analysis of this study. However, the activists themselves are the source of this information. We did not interview friends and relatives, except those friends who also happened to be activists (a fairly common phenomenon, as the activist network is rather small and well connected).

Activists informed us that the first reaction of relatives and close friends is typically "please, be careful". Thus, the first reaction of the people close to the activists is related to security. Such reactions then develop into feelings of caution and discouragement, on one hand, or pride, even delight, on the other hand.

³⁹ A literal translation of the Armenian equivalent, which is widely used «սղախարդ սղջիկ»

Some activists have encountered serious problems that developed into conflicts with their immediate or extended family members. This has been the case when the activist's relatives were part of the public sector system. Relatives working for the government continuously approach their activist relatives to discourage them from participating in activism. When the discouraging warnings do not achieve their purpose, the relatives shift to threats (which activists explain as follows: *"...because of their close relationship with authorities, who in their turn, press on them to influence us."*) Similarly, the alarming indications of security concerns on behalf of family members relate to the sense that one should "beware the police", a possibility that is probably expressed based on a belief that the police will likely use force. The notion of security, received either as friendly warning or purposeful discouragement, was mentioned by all participants. In the words of an activist from the city of Gyumri, *"Civic activity always brings risk with it."* Male, 33

Once a person is actively involved in public activities, relatives approach him or her as an 'alien'. However, it is possible that such reactions will change, as people begin to recognise the importance of participation or give up on their activist relatives or friends without trust.

In contrast, other relatives became rapturous, a condition that comes after some time. Some activists highlight that their friends' perceptions have had a substantial impact in terms of helping understand the transformation that some of their friends experienced as a result of their activist involvement. For example, some friends had consistently discouraged the activists, highlighting that there was no use of any participation. However, when the time of massive mobilisation came, activists noticed their friends at the protest. Seeing these people join the protests transformed how the activists saw their friends. As activist explains, *"...even those friends were there, which means every single person can become fed up with an injustice, and resort to protest, even the most distrustful ones."* Male, 23

Our data reveal the following regarding positive perceptions. Some activists gained more respectful treatment from their colleagues at work. As a result of becoming a popular activist, close to a public figure, their colleagues' treatment of them changed. They sensed that the change was positively influenced by their active public involvement.

Moreover, grandparents are usually extremely sceptical and have many security concerns, whereas parents are more understanding and sometimes even encourage participation. This is a clear indication of a generational issue. Older people have less confidence in the success of civic initiatives and are more prone to regard such initiatives through a security lens, whereas the younger population is more confident, fearless and free. An example of a change in perception is represented in the following story. A mother of an activist had always been extremely critical and discouraged her son from participation. She engaged in numerous activities to discourage him, including warnings and invoking notions of security. One day, however, the activist woke up in the morning to find his t-shirt with protest slogan on it, cleaned and ironed, next to his bed. As he recalls, *"In the morning, she looked at me and said, "Wake up, dear. You have to wear this and go [to a protest]"."* Male, 23

The mother of another activist originally discouraged her daughter from participating. However, once the mother received positive feedback on the initiative from a colleague, her attitude changed into pride that her daughter was a core member of a popular campaign.

Regarding the perceptions of relatives and others, it is also important to distinguish among the different issues addressed by the initiatives. For example, a female activist who was been involved in the Maternity Leave initiative says that the perceptions of all of her relatives and friends were positive. However, she relates this positive perception to the subject of the initiative, which is very much culturally accepted by the population. It would be difficult to find anyone with a negative perception of the specific subject because motherhood as a value is so widely and positively accepted in society. In her words, *“For example, I believe, if let’s say, I had shaved my head and joined an environmental movement, the perceptions of my relatives would have been much different.”* Activist, Female, 33

9.6. Public Perceptions of NGOs

Although negative perceptions still exist, we observe increasing numbers of NGOs being established to pursue real change. Years ago, NGOs were established to generate profit. Now, the tendency seems to be reorienting towards contributing to making change in pursuit of the public good.

While the older population remains somewhat distrustful of NGOs, the youth sees potential in these organisations, in terms of achieving goals with their help.

The difference between the public perceptions of NGOs and initiatives is that when an NGO organises a rally, for example, one question that comes to mind is, “who are they doing this for?” By contrast, such questions regarding financial support are not asked about the civic initiatives. There is an inherent suspicion towards the activities of formal entities and informal groups of self-organising people.

For reasons that are unclear, NGOs are regarded as ‘grant-eaters’, resulting in negative public perceptions of these organisations. However, it is important to make the public understand that the most genuine and largest grant recipient is the Armenian government and many of its agencies, such as the police. They also receive many grants from international donors, but the group that is regarded as ‘eating grants’ (defined as not delivering an impact but operating for themselves) is for some reason NGOs. This misunderstanding and confusion should change. In the words of an NGO member, *“The greatest ‘grant-eater’ is the Armenian government. But nobody seems to be paying attention to that.”* Male, 45

To conclude with a quote from a leader of NGO working and succeeding in making societal impact, *“People don’t know what ‘gender’ is, which is why are sceptical about it. The same way they don’t know what a ‘grant’ is, which is why there are negative stereotypes advocating the notion of NGOs being ‘grant-eaters’.”* Female, 60

9.7. Activists' Perception of NGOs (NGOs' Responses)

According to some responses from NGO members, the public differentiates between members of activist groups, who are just active, and those who are active due to their occupation, namely NGO members. Some NGO members complain that while working at an NGO is their job, they are also active, and thus, they should be regarded differently from other, informal activists with no occupation. Such distinctions, resulting in different perceptions by the public, are unfair.

Some NGO members confess that activists' perceptions of NGOs must be negative because organisations are not there when activists need them. The activists take the lead in voicing issues and concerns, mobilising the public, and organising rallies, and it is NGOs' role to join, which is something they do not always do. However, they should join to present a positive image to and encourage positive perceptions on the part of both activists and public.

There are negative perceptions of NGOs, but this is the fault of NGOs. They need to develop a broader vision and consider a larger impact to reach out to communities. The overall context of NGOs' involvement should change, which may then lead to a change in public perceptions. Otherwise, they are treated as agents of minor, generally individual work that solely benefits their organisations and staff members. This should change, and organisations should deliver a greater impact. NGOs should seek social change; otherwise their impact will be limited.

One of the main problems that NGOs in Armenia face, and the one that actually limits their impact, is that external funding generally comes with the condition that NGOs have to enter into the dialogue with the government. To fulfil this criterion, however, they must contend with an Armenian government that imposes conditions that limit NGOs' independence before they are allowed to participate in the dialogue. Thus, there is a multifaceted process contributing to NGOs' dependency on the government and preventing them from engaging in independent, objective work.

Speaking of important qualities that campaigns tend to spark within society, an NGO member highlights, *"I haven't seen so many intellectual faces gathered in one place in a long time."*⁴⁰ (Male, 45). The public's trust in civic initiatives is high, in contrast to that in the formal non-governmental sector in Armenia. Activist campaigns are welcomed by the public. One of the reasons is that the campaigns have yet to mislead the public. The public has not yet been deceived by the campaigns. Such deception would entail leading the public towards a purpose, only to have the leaders of initiatives, for example, align themselves with the authorities (which has been a common practice of some political parties, other state institutions, and NGOs). This is why civic initiatives are trusted, at least thus far.

Although the overall perceptions are positive, negative perceptions also exist. The negative perceptions fall into the following categories: a) the same old donor story, b) specific issues advocated by activists, or c) particular individuals within campaigns.

A negative perception may emerge due to persistent sentiments that any initiative has to have a sponsor, a stereotype holding that it is highly unlikely for people to mobilise for altruistic

⁴⁰ Reference made to Electric Yerevan initiative.

reasons. There are some groups of people in society who remain suspicious of initiatives, regardless of the topic, labelling the leaders as ‘somebody’s puppet’. Such opinionated or suspicious people are characterised as a ‘sick’ segment of the population, who base their arguments less on knowledge and instead on a blind belief in conspiracy theories. This particular segment of the population should be *redeemed* through activities intended to increase the level of trust in self-organising, informal, just and peaceful resistance to wrongdoing.

The public’s attitudes towards initiatives can become more negative, depending on the subject matter at hand. For example, campaigns organised to protect LGBT rights in Armenia usually result in negative perceptions. Specific, issue-based campaigns are regarded negatively because they seem to be promoting a certain agenda, generally that of international donors, that seeks to spread practices that contradict national values. Considerable work remains to be done to shift the public’s perceptions of issue-based campaigns that these serve the domestic population, not an external agenda.

Another reason that negative perceptions develop is the behaviour of individuals in civic campaigns. Sometimes people act as provocateurs of certain developments within the campaign, in response to threatening techniques employed by the authorities. Unfortunately, the government usually succeeds with this practice; leaders who are very active at the outset of a campaign ultimately become passive towards the campaign’s end. In addition, some NGO members believe that people satisfy their own ambitions by becoming an activist and fighting against an injustice. For some, such individual behaviour is simply a manifestation of individual desires, related to personal interests and gains. The main motivating factor for activists in this view is their personal drive to satisfy ambitions.

Several NGO leaders believe that there is mutual distrust between activists and NGOs. Interestingly, however, the majority of activists seem to have developed from their experiences with an NGO. The activists’ backgrounds usually contain NGO involvement, either as a staff member, volunteer or an intern. Some NGO members also admit the possibility of the opposite scenario: people come to work for NGOs as a result of their previous (and on-going) activist involvement. According to both NGO leaders and members, being an activist creates substantial opportunities for non-governmental sector involvement.

9.8. Perceptions of Relationship

One of the main focuses of this study was to explore the frameworks and ways in which two groups, NGOs and activists, cooperate. An important finding in this regard is that most interviewees regard cooperation as extremely important for a campaign’s success. NGO participation in campaigns is crucial and potentially necessary. There are issues that can only be solved with the assistance of a formal entity, whereas activists would encounter a multiplicity of obstacles in attempts to do so. There might be extreme differences in the groups’ backgrounds and ideologies, but the driving concern should, by all means, be uniting for success.

Some campaigns developed into NGOs, which is an indicator of a refusal to abandon the cause and take resistance to another level, by formal means. While a campaign is a space to express disagreement, the establishment of a legal entity provides an opportunity to select new strategies and engage in silent struggle via formal means. There are examples of initiatives registering as NGOs to be able to expand the scope of their activities.

Although admitting that some misunderstanding between the groups is possible, cooperation is generally observed. Popular areas of cooperation between the two include environmental and women's issues (such as combating violence against women). The avenue of mutual cooperation usually includes organising protests or providing support for protest meetings or discussions. Popular measures of support employed by NGOs include the provision of experts (for example, legal assistance when filing a court case) and technical support (for example, translation and printing). A specific example of cooperation between different groups in society can be seen in an initiative organised by Diaspora members to include NGOs, activists and other volunteers to monitor municipal elections with a large number of monitors across multiple polling stations in Yerevan in 2013.

NGOs have financial resources; activists have human resources. The two groups coming together will benefit society at large. It is natural for the two groups to cooperate to achieve public benefit and impact.

It is difficult to develop a relationship when there are ideological differences among group members. A common conflict in Armenia is that between nationalistic and liberal views. At times, liberal values do not accord with nationalistic beliefs. This is when conflict becomes inevitable, regardless of the participants' group affiliation.

Some NGO members note that there are difficulties in pursuing cooperation between the two groups due to a lack of consensus and mutual understanding, which is a result of certain conspiratorial thinking on who does what and represents who. This has become a social disease.

It has to be recognised that there are both activists and NGO members that are extremely critical of each other. There are activists who absolutely refuse to have any association with an NGO in the framework of activist campaign. Such a scenario will inevitably lead to failure due to established stereotypes within society regarding the formal non-governmental sector. There is little role for NGOs in civic initiatives, and for such sceptics, this limited contribution does not justify cooperation with NGOs. Similarly, sceptical NGO members are confident that initiatives are not likely to succeed without NGOs' backing or cooperation. Typically, activists invite NGOs to take part in campaigns, raise awareness, and contribute with journalistic or legal expertise. NGOs see their role as professionals guiding and providing support to civic activists. In the words of an NGO leader, "*There is no civic activism without NGOs standing behind them.*" Female, 64

X. Other Issues

– In Armenia, activists are a non-formal opposition to the government. (Activist, 27, Gyumri)

10.1. Politics, Political Parties and Activism

Throughout the discussions a major topic that developed concerned politicising versus not politicising concerns addressed by civic initiatives, as well as the distinction between “political” and “civic” and the relationship of civic initiatives to political parties.

For the overwhelming majority of activists and NGO members, it is impossible to not politicise issues when the campaign requires changing government policy. Because all of the campaigns were initiated to combat governmental decisions, thus the concerns addressed in all of the initiatives targeted political authorities, all of initiatives become politicised by default. In Armenia, civic means political and political means civic. There is no distinction between the two because all the civic activities seek to address a political reality.

Civic activism campaigns concern political issues, but they are not about political parties. This distinction must be made. The issues that initiatives pursue are political, but the organisers are not political party members. This specific distinction was raised during the Electric Yerevan campaign and shows the extent to which political parties do not have a good reputation. Being a political party member affects one’s involvement in an initiative. When visible political party members join civic initiatives, the public tends to react negatively. Political party members are seen as negatively influencing the outcome of a campaign, in terms of public mobilisation and trust. Because the public usually associates political party members with initiatives, the people perceive a risk that the initiative might align its goals with a given political party ideology or programme. Therefore, political parties and civic initiatives are considered mutually exclusive entities. If one is a member of a political party, then it will be very difficult for that person to become trusted among civic activists. Activists believe that such a person seeks to promote a party agenda; otherwise why would they join? This is a common understanding or stereotype.

In Armenian society, being a member of a political party is regarded sarcastically and negatively. This is due to the negative connotations that exist in connection to political parties, which are characterised as institutions that have lost their reputation. Another problem with parties is that they are extremely individualised: each party is seen through the lens of its main leadership.

Our interviewees maintained that no ‘pure’ person wants to become involved in a political party; if one does, that person becomes ‘unclean’ and acquires a reputation similar to that of the party (which is usually corrupt) and is considered to be promoting party ‘ideology’. However, the system will not change unless bright young individuals enter politics and do the ‘cleaning’ themselves (which is also dubious because the parties tend to absorb young potential). Nevertheless, a similar argument is made by several activists, who believe in making change through engaging with the government rather than advocating resistance. Activists are simply

reactionary, as they react to policies, whereas it would have been productive to direct this energy into politics. It is bizarre to hear activists state that they do not want to be included in politics because it is ‘dirty’. One must become involved in politics to change it. Otherwise, activists will always remain activists who are simply reacting to things while not having any tangible input in the policy-making process itself.

The line of critical argument concerning political parties has a number of causes. Political parties have no will to cooperate with any other groups. They work in isolation. Political culture is corrupt because the parties do not form and operate based on ideologies but on profits. This is an important indicator of the political culture, demonstrating that it is unhealthy. Political parties do not embrace a cooperative culture, whether with local entities or international bodies, not to mention the lack of any culture of debate. They lack many important qualities that are crucial for developing a healthy political culture. In the words of a political activist, *“If Armenia had a full-fledged and effectively operating political party system, then there would be no need to develop civic activism.”* Male, 57

10.2 Armenia’s top problems and ways to improve

– *There is no need for a new civil society. There is a need to awaken our society.* (Activist, 29, Yerevan)

It would be irrelevant, if not naïve, to discuss civil society and ignore the problems currently facing the country. This section presents the observable problems in Armenia, as perceived by our interviewees, followed by possible means of addressing them.

The detachment of the government from the public, the need for a shift from an individualistic to a community perspective, the lack of public bonding and dialogue, as well as institutional rehabilitation and economic development are among the subjects most urgently demanding the attention of the government, non-governmental sector, businesses and the public at large.

The Armenian government is profoundly detached from the Armenian public. The main reason for the on-going public discontent is this disconnect. The lack of governmental attention, to problems in a variety of sectors, results in malfunctioning policies thereby opening a new space for public dissatisfaction. The government should pay attention to even the most minor eruptions within society and take the time to understand them. Independent research and analysis are necessary to identify issues that would contribute to building a foundation for a connection to the public. Another approach is simply to uphold the constitutional order in the republic. Complying with the provisions prescribed by the Constitution in practice will help the country to develop and help its people to become connected to the government.

NGOs should strive to become the instrument to unite the disconnected government and the public. They should operate as mediators and, importantly, regard this as their essential function. NGOs should be instrumental in creating a public understanding that it is possible for

the society to become an equal participant in decision-making processes along with the government. Only then will there be positive changes in the perceptions of NGOs. Armenia should replicate the Western experience with the non-governmental sector and make it important and trusted. NGOs should take responsibility for communicating with the public. This is their main role, which the majority of organisations are failing to fulfil. Communicating with the public involves explanatory or awareness-raising methods with the main message that the public has the right and capacity to contribute to policy-making.

To successfully address many problems, Armenians need to shift from an individualistic perspective to a community perspective. This refers to a range of issues, from the most minor aspects of life to broader concerns. Regarding the importance of change starting from the most minor behavioural manifestations, an NGO leader highlights the following:

“We are used to cleaning the space in front of our apartment’s entrance, while the rest of the building being in a disastrous condition doesn’t matter to us. Whatever is outside of our door is not our responsibility. Such a small example introduces much, and we need to get rid of an approach that advocates the sole wellbeing of an individual and his/her family. We need an approach that advocates the wellbeing of the whole community. This approach will help take civic activism to another level, to get closer to exercising ideal conditions for civil society.” Female, 57

It is also important to eliminate the stereotype regarding female participation in protests. The society should begin to advocate that such participation is totally acceptable.

Many educational institutions, agencies, and even factories are politicised. This leads people to develop harmful qualities. Ensuring the wellbeing of the country will become possible by changing its educational system. The civic education of a citizen should begin at an early age, in the home and school. The children should be educated as citizens at schools. Schools in Armenia are overly politicised, which is another problem and leads to the distortion of basic values.

The school system should be transformed such that it is able to develop a new and a better generation, one aware of and prepared to struggle for its rights. To achieve that, however, they need to overcome overwhelming apathy. All institutions should be freed from political pressure and control. Educational institutions have to do more than provide formal education. Presently informal education on how to be a citizen should be taught at higher educational institutions, if not middle schools. Pupils and students have to be instructed in these qualities that are important for society. The notion of activism, as an inalienable constituent component of a developed society, should be taught and advocated in school. What it means to be a good citizen, to be active and to be involved should be a topic included in the curriculum in the education system. The Armenian population should consider ways to progress, raise awareness, become better educated, and thus involved, to formulate informed decisions and to plan strategic struggles.

The best way to develop a society is to create a public dialogue: open discourse about plans, reforms and also minor activities in every sector. This will help energise responsible citizens who are prepared to demand their rights. In a developed civil society, each individual realises his or her own power and potential to change things and act accordingly. There is a group of people in Armenia who fit this definition. Most of our interviewees consider such developments not only possible but also the only way forward.

Two things that will change the established order are public turnout and trust (increased trust in the possibility of change). Therefore, developing a deliberative culture will be the main tool to achieve change. The society should work to learn methods and ways to achieve justice through peaceful resistance; there is no other way to achieve it. Resistance should not be the aim. However, it should be considered a serious method to achieve aims.

Uniting different groups of people and spreading such practices throughout the regions of the country is another important consideration. The most active groups should seek to unite different social groups, organisations, and activists as such unity will lead to strength. The Armenian society should develop to involve self-organisation of larger groups.

Armenia needs a culture of free and fair elections. The population's trust in institutions will also increase once the public learns that representatives are elected according to their will – based on free and fair elections. Armenia has to rehabilitate its political party sector. Armenia lacks a developed political party system. Armenia needs its young bright individuals to become a part of the political structure. This is only possible by first becoming a part of political parties. However the overwhelming majority of high-quality, educated individuals (mostly youth) refuses to become a part of any political party, arguing that they do not want to become 'dirty'. How can they change something instrumental otherwise? We need them involved to ensure that individuals change the system, not the other way around. To quote a 32-year-old female activist,

“Civic initiatives are important for changing the culture, to develop alternative thinking; however, in order to achieve political changes people have to strive to be included in political institutions, to engage in the political sphere for political changes.”

Armenia has to urgently consider its economic development, developing business opportunities to create an environment in which people wish to stay and develop a sense of security and public wellbeing. Armenia must consider creating value, developing economically, creating jobs, and investing generated income to secure sustainable development.

To conclude, Armenia does not need a new society but a new societal definition in terms of understanding the public's roles and responsibilities. Increased understanding and development of social responsibility will contribute to realising a quality society and the formation of a new, responsible body of citizens. Armenian society is in an ideological crisis. It is possible to address this crisis if much work is done in a variety of sectors and by diverse actors.

Conclusion

For the past two decades, Armenian civil society was largely equated with the NGO sector. International development organisations, public officials, scholars and the few informed members of the general public regarded NGOs as the core element of Armenian civil society. The NGO sector is now relatively developed and institutionalised, but it is detached from the broader Armenian society. In that sense it remains a post-communist civil society. However, a new actor has recently entered the civil society arena and made its presence visible. Civic initiatives have been on the rise since circa 2007 and have already registered a number of successes in affecting government decisions, despite the small numbers of people involved. Youth-driven, social-media-powered, issue-specific civic activism is a new form of protest and political participation. Armenian civil society is no longer simply a matter of NGOs, although NGOs unquestionably remain a crucial component of civil society. The landscape of Armenian civil society has changed.

Focusing on NGOs when discussing civil society in a post-communist context is somewhat ironic, as the concept of civil society was popularised in the late 1980s by referring to mass mobilisation and social movements that challenged various countries' communist regimes. As those movements lost momentum, NGOs came to replace them as the main 'substance' of civil society. Empowered mostly through foreign development aid, rather than grassroots involvement, NGOs perform a wide range of tasks, from humanitarian assistance to advocacy, but fail to attract most Armenians' trust or interest in their cause.

Armenian civil society is now unquestionably more complex than it was ten or even five years ago. Ten years ago, civil society in Armenia largely meant NGOs. This is no longer the case. The emergence (or re-emergence, depending on one's historical framework) of civic activism creates some new internal dynamics in the field of civil society, producing new patterns of operation, networking and mobilising. Both NGOs and civic initiatives have distinct modes of functioning, strengths and weaknesses. They can and sometimes do complement one another. For example, NGOs offer their expertise to the activist groups, while civic initiatives can energise NGOs and provide a much-needed link to the public. There is considerable evidence of NGO members actively participating in civic initiatives as individuals. In general, NGOs, as organisations, have thus far operated from behind the scenes, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Our research shows that there is both cooperation and tension between the 'old' NGO sector and the 'new' civic activism elements of Armenian civil society.

Addressing the Research Questions

Although the project has amassed a wealth of data that go well beyond the research questions posed, it is necessary here to tighten the narrative by returning to the starting point. Over the course of two years, what have we learned about the mutual perceptions of civic activists and NGOs, their patterns of interaction and the impact of the overall political culture? This section will address each of the Research Questions in turn.

RQ.1: How do NGOs and activists perceive each other?

NGO's perceptions of activists are overwhelmingly positive: activists are the progressive youth, the source of hope, the new generation that has the stamina to stand up for its rights and is able and willing to break stereotypes. Activists are even somewhat romanticised as the "progressive", "intellectual," "the educated" sector of society. Beauty, of course, is in the eye of the beholder. Our task, as researchers, is not to define what "progressive" might mean but to highlight that our interviews depict a much more complex picture. For example, not all activists we interviewed saw other activists as "progressive." We heard descriptions such as "patriarchal", "closed", "disorganised," "nationalist," or "selfish." We even heard conspiracy theories that one or another particular campaign was secretly supported or even organised by the government. Activists themselves do not always and necessarily regard one another as unconditional comrades-in-arms on the same side of the barricade, but NGOs tended to see them all in a positive light.

By contrast, activists' perceptions of NGOs were rather varied, nuanced, and generally guarded. Most activists stressed the existing diversity within the NGO sector and the need to differentiate between "good" and "bad" NGOs, and between the ones that "serve the public interest" and the NGOs that are 'grant-eaters' and in the 'government's pocket'. However, the attitude towards the first type, the "good" NGOs, was cordial but not overly enthusiastic. They are doing their job and are being paid for it. It is good to have their help. According to the activists, NGOs are certainly not knights in shining armour. The approach is rather pragmatic.

RQ.2: How do NGOs and activists interact?

Unsurprisingly, our study found a range of forms and levels of interaction between activists and NGOs. A somewhat surprising finding, however, was that NGOs are considerably more present in civic initiatives than we had expected at the outset. Nevertheless, they were much less visible to the activists themselves than they were to us. When we started our project, we were under the impression that three out of five cases had no NGO involvement. NGOs were visible, at the 'front of the stage' in the Teghut case but they were situated 'back stage' in the Maternity Leave campaign (an intentional decision by NGOs, found in a previous study). We found that Afrikyan was a bizarre case of explicit and intensive NGO involvement that went unnoticed by the activists. Electric Yerevan used NGO data-gathering reports to strengthen its cause, and even the most tightly knit, anti-NGO campaign, Dem Em, was at one point promoted by an NGO. This promotion could have been on the NGO's own initiative and had minimal impact. However, this

is not the point we are attempting to make. Our point is that NGOs are involved: as explicitly recognised partners, information providers, or uninvited supporters. Regard this as a positive sign of interaction between these two elements of the civil society ecosystem.

RQ.3: How are NGOs and activists influenced by the overall political culture in the country?

Political culture is an inherently complex and rather vague concept. In our work, we only touch on a few aspects of it, mostly revolving around non-conventional political participation and political information channels. Survey data reveal that people are distrustful of social movements, of political protest and of politics in general. A dramatic 78% of the Armenian population said they “would never join a demonstration”. This places civic activists in a rather negative cultural environment, particularly because demonstrations are a core element of their campaigns. Yet, the activists seemed undaunted. Most activists told us that they believed that the public had rather positive perceptions of activism. The negative aspect of the political culture that the activists were most concerned with was what some of them called “extreme individualism”: people looking after only their own interests and not seeing the bigger picture. Indeed, the activists might have a point. Recall that three successful campaigns (Maternity Leave, Dem Em and Electric Yerevan) concerned clearly defined monetary losses that would occur if the government were permitted to proceed with its plans. The two campaigns that failed addressed less tangible public goods. All would benefit from a clean environment, sustainable development and a more culturally attractive Yerevan, yet the loss of a patch of forest or an old building does not seem to most people to be a personal loss. This might be a disheartening finding, but it is important to realise that some issues have stronger mobilising potential than others. Armenian political culture does not appear to exhibit sufficient concern about public goods. This definitely negatively impacts activism and NGO work.

On a positive note, civic activism seems to be the arena in which civil society is able to overcome the post-communist syndrome of disengagement. Civic activists have become visible challengers to power holders today, as civic activism campaigns were able to promote their own agenda. The civic initiatives have shown that the people power matters. However, it remains to be seen whether civic activism will gain momentum and engage more people, thus delivering greater impact. We must recognise that all campaigns have been reactions to governmental policies or decisions. For a greater impact, this reactionary approach should change. The society should be vigilant and pro-active instead of reactive to construct a reality the Armenian public aims for. More possibilities for engagement are needed for many and diverse groups. Whether it will be done by activists or organisations, there is a need to reach out to the latent layers of population, since there is potential, which has yet to be realised.

The Armenian society should build on its positive experience of impact by being self-reflective, community-oriented, and open to new and creative non-violent methods of resistance. The informally developing activism combined with active formal organisational structures, should serve as a source of inspiration for better and informed involvement aimed at developing a healthy political culture of participation.

A note on the applicability of the literature on social movements

As civic initiatives are a relatively new phenomenon in Armenia, they present an intriguing scientific puzzle regarding the applicability of theory to practice. Which social science concepts and approaches are well suited to explain the dynamics on the ground? Although the activists often stated that their activities are not social movements, at the outset of our research project, we hypothesised that social movement framework could offer helpful insights. Respecting activists' wish not to be called what they think they are not, we refrained from using this framework in discussing the research results, but we did bear it in mind when analysing our data. At the end of our journey, we would like to offer our reflections on the applicability of some of the concepts, particularly drawing on the work of Tilly and Tarrow. The two contemporary classics of social movement research note that escalation and radicalisation often occur when the challenged state "responds with vigour" (2015). We observed this during the Electric Yerevan campaign. When the state dispersed a relatively small crowd with water cannons, the protests visibly grew in number. State overreaction clearly helped strengthen the protests.

What about explaining some of the weaknesses of civic activism? A question that both the activists themselves and the broader interested public seemed to be grappling with was 'why do those protests peter out'? While there are clearly achievements to speak of, one often hears the lament that not enough mobilisations occur. Why is civic activism not becoming more widespread? We believe that Tilly and Tarrow provide some guidance in that respect in their elaboration of the concept of the social movement base: "movement organisations, networks, participants and the accumulated cultural artefacts, memories, and traditions that contribute to social movement campaigns" (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 148). We hypothesise that this is lacking in Armenia and seems to be the reason that the initiatives we studied did not grow into sustained movements. Based on our case studies, Dem Em performed somewhat better at having a base and was clearly successful in sustaining mobilisation over an extended period of time. These are hypotheses worth investigating in future research.

Another concept that might help explain the lack of a shift in scale is "certification: an external authority's signal of its readiness to recognize and support the existence and claims of a political actor" (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 36). Certification by an external authority adds legitimacy to protests and grievances voiced; it would make it more difficult for the government to ignore activists. There does not seem to have been any certification in the cases that we observed. Western embassies and local offices of various international organisations urged the Armenian authorities not to resort to violence against demonstrations and to investigate any cases of violence that did occur, but this was the extent of such support. That might partially explain why the initiative failed to increase in scale. Again, this is a matter that should be empirically tested in the future. As Armenian civil society is likely to remain active (and hopefully become more active), we will certainly witness the emergence of more campaigns. Those interested in the topic should be prepared to conduct further research. As the activists themselves noted on numerous occasions, better understanding leads to more involvement, smarter actions and a better situation overall. One step at a time...

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Appendix I Focus Group Guide for Civic Activists

Discussion with participants from Yerevan other town/village Armenian Diaspora

1. What is Civic Activism to you? How do you understand the term? Please define Civic Activism.
2. Why are you involved/ why do you participate? What is your main purpose, internal motivation? For you personally, what attracts you and what makes it difficult for you to participate? What types of issues make you determined to participate, what really matters to you and makes you get involved?
3. What is the impact of Civic Activism on your life?
4. Societal perception of Civic Activism: how are Civic Activism Campaigns/Civic Initiatives perceived by Armenian society today? (Sub-question: What is your experience? How are you (as a civic activist) perceived by your friends/relatives/larger society? Your relationship with other people (neighbours, classmates, colleagues).
5. What is your relationship with other Civic Activists? Is there one? If so, how did it evolve? If not, why not?
6. In your opinion, what makes Civic Activism Campaigns/Civic Initiatives a success (leads to positive resolution)? (*prompt: creativity of activists in using techniques & methods to mobilise, inclination of authorities to cooperate, an obvious failure in governmental policy/decision-making, public outrage*).
7. What is the role of social media in Civic Activism in Armenia? What is your own experience in this regard?
8. Armenian NGOs. What is your opinion of, perceptions, attitudes about/towards NGOs in Armenia? Do you think NGOs help or hinder Civic Activism in Armenia? (Sub-question: do you have any experience (*prompt: working, volunteering, getting information from, etc.*) with Armenian NGOs? If yes, what is it?
9. Do you think Armenia needs a different civil society? If yes, what should be the difference? How should we get there? Recommendations.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix 2 Focus Group Guide for NGO Leaders

Discussion with participants from Yerevan other town/village

1. What is Civic Activism to you? How do you understand the term? Please define Civic Activism.
2. What role does Civic Activism (defined as Civic Activism Campaigns/Civic Initiatives) play in Armenia today? (*probe: any impact?*)
3. How do you think Civic Activists perceive (prompt: positive, negative, stereotypes) NGOs? Should these two groups be interacting/cooperating? Yes/No. Why? Which of the scenarios would produce better results?
4. Examples: do you have any experience/relationship in cooperating with Civic Activists? (Members of your NGO?)
5. If yes, why do/did you cooperate? What is/was easy/difficult in cooperation?
 - a. What is/was the tension, if there was any? What is/was your overall impression of cooperation? (*prompt: disorganised vs. responsible, effective vs. lousy*)
6. If no, why?
7. What are perceptions (*prompt: positive, negative*)/stereotypes regarding NGOs in Armenia today?
8. Do you think Armenia needs a different civil society? If yes, what should be the difference? How should we get there? Recommendations.
9. If you could change something in today's Armenian political culture (*prompt: political participation, public attitudes towards political actors/politics, cooperation/conflict*), what would it be?

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix 3 Focus Group Guide for Non-Activists

Discussion with participants from Yerevan other town/village

1. What is today's political culture in Armenia? (*prompt: political participation, public attitudes toward political actors/politics, cooperation/conflict*)
How does this political culture affect your life? In what way/s?
2. What do you think are the top problems in Armenia today?
3. Do you think citizens, people like you, can have any role in solving these problems? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Have you heard of Civic Initiatives in Armenia? What do you know about them? What role does Civic Activism (defined as Civic Activism Campaigns/Civic Initiatives) play in Armenia today? (*prompt: any impact?*)
5. Have you ever been involved in any Civic Activism Campaign/Civic Initiative, or a similar activity? If yes, what made you join? If not, why not?
6. Have you ever considered joining? Please mention the top three reasons that prevent you from joining Civic Activism Campaigns/Civic Initiatives (physical participation).
7. Ideally, to what extent and how should the general public participate in decision-making (*prompt: regarding questions that affect them*)?

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix 4 Interview Guide for Civic Activists

Name _____ Gender F M Age _____
Level of education Elementary Secondary Vocational Higher
From Yerevan town village Diaspora other

1. What is Civic Activism to you? How do you understand the term? Please define Civic Activism.
2. Personal story. How did you get involved? Since when? Why? Why are you still involved? What is your main purpose? Civic Activism's impact on your life.
3. How are Civic Activism Campaigns/Civic Initiatives perceived (*prompt: positive, negative, stereotypes, etc.*) by Armenian society today? What is your experience? How are you (as a Civic Activist) perceived (*prompt: positive, negative*) by your friends/relatives/larger society? Your relationship with other people (neighbours, classmates, colleagues). Only for females: (*Prompt: does 'being female' in any way affect societal attitudes towards you?*)
4. What is your relationship with other Civic Activists? How did it evolve?
5. Armenian NGOs. What is your opinion of, perceptions, attitudes towards NGOs in Armenia? What role do they play in the country? What role should they play in the country?
6. Do you interact with Armenian NGOs? If so, how? Your experience with Armenian NGOs. If not, why not?
7. Do NGOs help or hinder Civic Activism in Armenia? Why? Examples.
8. Specific questions for participants of five case studies:
 - a. Was it a success? How do you define its resolution?
 - b. Further steps and expectations.
 - c. The role of social media in this specific case/s.
9. Do you think Armenia needs a different civil society? If yes, what should be the difference? How should we get there? Recommendations.

-- Snowballing questions: Who would you recommend?

- For Focus Groups (leaders and active participants of campaigns)
- For Interviews (NGO members that have been involved in any kind of relationship with activists)

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix 5 Interview Guide for NGO Leaders

Name _____ Gender F M Age _____
Level of education Elementary Secondary Vocational Higher
From Yerevan town village Armenian Diaspora other

1. What is today's political culture in Armenia? (*prompt: a. political participation, b. public attitudes toward political actors/politics, c. cooperation/conflict*) How does this political culture affect your NGO? In what way/s?
2. What are perceptions (*prompt: positive, negative*)/stereotypes regarding NGOs in Armenia today?
3. What is Civic Activism to you? How do you understand the term? Please define Civic Activism.
4. What role does Civic Activism play in Armenia today? How is Civic Activism/are Civic Activists perceived (*prompt: positive, negative*) by Armenian society today? Any stereotypes?
5. How do you think Civic Activists perceive (*prompt: positive, negative*) NGOs? Should these two groups be interacting/cooperating? Yes/No. Why? Which of the scenarios would produce better results?
6. Do you have any experience/relationship in cooperating with Civic Activists? (Members of your NGO?)
7. If yes, why do/did you cooperate? What is/was easy/difficult in cooperation? What is/was the tension, if such? What is/was your overall impression of cooperation? (*prompt: disorganised vs. responsible, effective vs. lousy*). If not, why not?
8. Do you think Armenia needs a different civil society? If yes, what should be the difference? How should we get there? Recommendations.
9. If you could change something in today's Armenian political culture, what would it be?
10. *Experience with case-study campaigns:* How, in what way, did you participate in the following five campaigns:
 - a. Save Teghut Civic Initiative; b. Maternity Leave; c. Dem Em; d. Let's Preserve the Afrikyan Club Building; e. Electric Yerevan.
11. If no participation (to any of these cases): why?

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix 6 Qualitative Data Indexing Scheme

1. **Civic activism**
 - 1.1 Defining the term (narrative)
 - 1.2 Defining the term (words & phrases)
 - 1.3 Other
2. **Political culture**
 - 2.1 Armenia today (narrative)
 - 2.2 Affecting activism
 - 2.3 Affecting NGOs
 - 2.4 What to change
 - 2.5 Other
3. **Civic initiatives**
 - 3.1 Success factors
 - 3.2 Factors of failure
 - 3.3 Social media role
 - 3.4 Other
4. **Personal story of activists**
 - 4.1 Get involved: how
 - 4.2 Get involved: when
 - 4.3 Get involved: purpose/motivation
 - 4.4 Get involved: impact on life
 - 4.5 Other
5. **Perception**
 - 5.1 Civic initiatives by public at large
 - 5.1.1 Positive
 - 5.1.2 Negative
 - 5.2 NGOs by public at large
 - 5.2.1 Positive
 - 5.2.2 Negative
 - 5.3 Activists by public at large
 - 5.3.1 Positive
 - 5.3.2 Negative
 - 5.4 Activists by relatives & friends
 - 5.4.1 Positive
 - 5.4.2 Negative
 - 5.5 Female activists by others
 - 5.5.1 Positive
 - 5.5.2 Negative
- 5.6 **Civic Activists by NGOs**
 - 5.6.1 Positive
 - 5.6.2 Negative
 - 5.6.3
- 5.7 **NGOs by Activists**
 - 5.7.1 Positive
 - 5.7.2 Negative
- 5.8 Other
6. **Relationship/Interaction: Activists & NGOs**
 - 6.1 Development
 - 6.2 Cooperation
 - 6.3 Conflict
 - 6.4 Negative
 - 6.5 Stereotypes
 - 6.6 Other
7. **Armenia in need of a different civil society**
 - 7.1 Recommendations
 - 7.1.1 Positive
 - 7.1.2 How to get there
 - 7.1.3 Negative
 - 7.1.4 Other
8. **Five case-studies**
 - 8.1 *Save Teghut Civic Initiative*
 - 8.1.1 Story
 - 8.1.2 Success
 - 8.1.3 Failure
 - 8.1.4 Social media
 - 8.1.5 Further steps, expectations
 - 8.1.6 NGO involvement
 - 8.1.7 Other
 - 8.2 *Maternity Leave Law*
 - 8.2.1 Story
 - 8.2.2 Success
 - 8.2.3 Failure
 - 8.2.4 Social media
 - 8.2.5 Further steps, expectations
 - 8.2.6 NGO involvement
 - 8.2.7 Other
 - 8.3 *Preserve Afrikyan Club Building*
 - 8.3.1 Story
 - 8.3.2 Success
 - 8.3.3 Failure

- 8.3.4 Social media
- 8.3.5 Further steps, expectations
- 8.3.6 NGO involvement
- 8.3.7 Other
- 8.4 *Dem Em (I Am Against)*
 - 8.4.1 Story
 - 8.4.2 Success
 - 8.4.3 Failure
 - 8.4.4 Social media
 - 8.4.5 Further steps, expectations
 - 8.4.6 NGO involvement
 - 8.4.7 Other
- 8.5 *Electric Yerevan*
 - 8.5.1 Story
 - 8.5.2 Success
 - 8.5.3 Failure
- 8.5.4 Social media
- 8.5.5 Further steps, expectations
- 8.5.6 NGO involvement
- 8.5.7 Other
- 9. Non-Activists**
 - 9.1 People & participation in general
 - 9.2 Participation experience: positive
 - 9.3 Participation experience: negative
 - 9.4 Defining ideal participation
 - 9.5 Armenia's top problems today
 - 9.6 Other
- 10. Other**
 - 10.1 Interesting material
 - 10.2 Quotes