The study examines Armenian civil society in terms of active participation, volunteering and trust. The research is based on the theoretical framework claiming that the Soviet experience of mistrust and ‘compulsory volunteering’ left its negative impact on civil societies in post-communist countries, leading to low trust, and low membership in associations. Combined with the overall social disengagement, this is the essence of the current “weakness” of “post-communist” civil society (Howard 2003). Howard’s assessment is the starting point of our research project, to be tested for current day Armenia. The main concepts of the study are: trust towards NGOs, membership in NGOs and volunteering. The main questions posed are:

- Is Armenian civil society still post-communist?
- What (if anything) has changed?
- Is the younger generation different?

Levels of analysis:
- Macro: cross-country comparison
- Mezo: Armenian NGOs
- Micro: individual attitudes (quantitative and qualitative)

Methods:
Secondary data: World Values Survey, Caucasus Barometer, Life in Transition, Civil Society Index
NGO Survey; (online and phone) 188 responses, respondents identified through Googling technique
Semi-structured interviews: 20 NGO leaders and 10 volunteers (purposive sampling to maximise diversity)

The civil society sector is:

<table>
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<th>Trusted because of</th>
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<tr>
<td>Civic activists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governmental policies including oversight mechanisms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spread of governmental or organised civil society organisations</td>
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<td>Negative image</td>
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<td>Public mentality</td>
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- Armenia has higher and increasing numbers of volunteers in the South Caucasus (Figure 2)
- Older people volunteer less in Armenia
- Men volunteer more in Armenia

Post-communist countries still have lower membership in associations, compared to the rest of the world; the difference is statistically significant.

- Armenia has the lowest and decreasing levels of trust towards NGOs in the South Caucasus (Figure 1).

NGOs in Armenia are trusted less than the police and the media. Young people and rural residents have more trust towards NGOs in Armenia.

- Membership in associations in Armenia is extremely low and decreasing.

Changes as a result of transition period:

- Psychological change of growing interest related to the on-going social and political phenomena within society, resulting in behavioural change manifested in active public participation and increased volunteering. The change of the institutional environment has resulted in great diversity of NGOs that has led to competition and thus difficulties of getting financed.

- Technological advancement is a change which has resulted in increased working productivity and visibility of civil society organisations.

- Half of the NGOs surveyed claim to be active in the human rights sector
- Most organisations (75%) have experienced leadership change
- Old organisations run by founding leaders receive fewer grants
- Most NGOs are run by men, women have supporting roles.
- 90% of NGOs have volunteers
- 72% of NGOs have websites, 65% use Facebook
- NGOs overestimate public trust towards them (Figure 3).
- Older organisations are better institutionalised in terms of leadership change, their staff is paid more and they receive more grants per year.

- Younger NGOs use Internet and social media more.

Post-communist weakness of civil society persists in the region and in Armenia: mistrust and disengagement are still widespread

- The reasons for the “weakness” are rooted in the current reality more than in the communist legacy
- The Armenian NGO sector is institutionalised but detached from the public
- People join associations mostly out of career expectations
- Informal volunteering is on the rise

Conclusion

The society organisations.

Figure 1. Average trust towards NGOs, Caucasus Barometer, mean on a scale from 1 to 5 (“fully trust”)

Figure 2. Self-reported volunteering in the South Caucasus, Caucasus Barometer, % of “yes”

Figure 3. Trust towards NGOs: Organisational survey vs. Caucasus Barometer, 2013, %