Russia's Complex Civil Society: Exploring Its Role in Political

Transformation and Governance in Tatarstan

by

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Abstract

Following the economic and political liberalization of the 1990s, Russian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) experienced a backlash from the new political Russian regime limiting their potential in political transformation and governance. CSOs in Russian regions have had various degrees of success in connecting with the population and channelling the grassroots knowledge to the governance level. Although impacted by these federal political trends, Tatarstan's civil society has developed its own unique features.

This qualitative study is based on a grounded theory methodology that joins a conversation about regional civil societies in Russia. Drawing on 35 semi-structured interviews with civil society activists, this research project explored the role of Tatarstan's civil society in locally based political transformation and governance. The study revealed several key obstacles to advancing civil society's potential as an advocate for the needs of local people. First, Tatarstan's civil society was divided into three main sub-groups: service providers (the so-called socially oriented CSOs), CSOs with a political agenda and informal independent groups, all of which performed important roles yet had minimum cooperation across the sector. Second, government control over CSOs suppressed civic activism beyond the rigidly defined state priorities. Authorities were cautious, however, to enforce punitive measures against the civic initiatives supported by local people. Third, in addition to activists feeling disempowered by the repressive state, the grassroots population expressed little interest in civil society participation. The latter also illustrated that Tatarstan's residents felt no ownership over designing and implementing civil society projects. The study proposes that CSOs across all sub-sectors develop a collaboration framework and joint strategy based on the knowledge they receive from local people by engaging with them on a meaningful level. The increased popular support could empower CSOs to resist the state's pressure and enhance their role in political transformation and governance.

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In addition, I would like to thank my parents for inspiring me to pursue a doctoral degree and supporting me during this journey. To my friends near and far, thank you for your support and encouragement. Last but not least, I would like to express my great appreciation to my study participants, who chose to share their stories with me, and to all of Tatarstan's civil society activists working hard to make our home a better place to live in.

Note on transliteration

The transliteration of Russian words in this thesis is based on the Library of Congress system with a few modifications. I have omitted diacritical marks, as well as hard and soft signs to facilitate the reading for non-Russian speakers (for example, I used obshestvennost rather than obshestvennost'). Names ending –ii (short i) have been shortened to –y (for example, Sergey). I also used Ya- and Ye- instead of Ia- for the names, which reflects common usage in English (for example, Yeltsin instead of Ieltsin, Bolotnaya instead of Bolotnaia). In citations, I have maintained the original conversion (for example, Gel'man). Unless otherwise specified, all translations and transliteration from Russian are my own. The citations of the research participants are translated from Russian, which is a gendered language. For instance, the words person, activist, and human being in Russian are masculine. Although in the direct quotations I have translated them literally as "he" or "himself," it is possible that research participants had no intention to ascribe any gender but used a grammatically correct form.

Chapter 1

Introduction. Creating civil society space in Russia: The case of Tatarstan

Introduction

The Republic of Tatarstan (Tatarstan), which has been cited as a Russian decentralization

success story since 1992 (Faller, 2011), "ran out of luck" by 2017 (Sergeev, 2018) when its

unique powersharing agreement with the federal government finally expired. Once undeniably

distinct, the current political development of Tatarstan, including its civil society, increasingly

resembles national trends. The Freedom House Report has rated Russian democracy, including

the suppression of civil society, for several years now. In 2018, Russia scored 6.5 out of 7 (the

second worst score) for not being a free society, and it shared one category with Afghanistan,

Kazakhstan, Rwanda, and DR Congo (Freedom House, 2018). The 2019 report demonstrates that

Russia's freedom rating has remained 6.5 out of 7 (Freedom House, 2019) and offers pessimistic

scenarios for the future of Russian civil society. However, media reports from the Russian

regions, which in Tatarstan mostly originate from the independent online outlets (such as

Idel.Realii), illustrate that civil society groups and organizations across the country are diverse

and active both in protesting government decisions and in providing essential services to the

population. By responding to the everyday needs of the population, they capture local grassroots

realities that are in progress.

These discrepancies in the assessment of civil society raise a question of whether local

understandings are reflected in designing the local civil society agenda. Moreover, how do the

experiences of civil society activists, living and working in Russia's regions, impact their

strategies and everyday practices? To advocate for a transformational strategy, it is critical to

understand the experiences of civil society activists and their evaluation of civil society prospects

in Russia's regions, particularly in those regions that previously impacted federal affairs, such as Tatarstan.

Research background

The inception of Russia's civil society organizations (CSOs) was stimulated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and an attempt at economic and political liberalization. The latter produced dubious results for Russia's civil society. The new CSOs were established to advocate for human rights and liberties. Structurally and strategically these new organizations resembled Western Europe and North America's non-governmental organizations (NGOs). On the one hand, considering the violent suppression of political dissent in October 1993 and the first Chechen war, establishing and upholding the new human rights framework was one of the most critical issues in Russia. On the other hand, liberal NGOs did not increase local support for civil society nor did they produce a long-lasting impact on governance structures. The CSOs that primarily advocate for human rights also failed to establish productive relations with the service-proving nonprofits, which led to the division of Russia's civil society sector.

In view of the recent debate on the value of Russia's civil society under the current political regime, this qualitative study aims to explore the role of civil society in political transformation and governance in Tatarstan. This exploratory case study is informed by Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) theories, in particular, the middle-range leadership and web of peace approaches (Lederach, 1997, 2010) that encourage researchers and practitioners to imagine civil society in the web of its relations with other societal levels. These approaches are specifically valuable in analyzing civil society in post-peace accord societies where the peacebuilders' political democratization and economic liberalization efforts were fruitless.

Despite the fact that the historical and political context in Russia's regions is different from those in post-peace accord societies, PACS theories provide scholars and practitioners with tools not only to investigate the failures of attempted democratization efforts but also to offer an outlook to create change. In this research, a grounded theory qualitative methodology is used to analyze the data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with Tatarstan's civil society activists to explore the everyday experiences of local civil society activists.

The focus on the experiences of civic activists was driven by the importance of agency and local ownership (Donais, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2014; Richmond, 2011b; Shinoda, 2015) and, in particular, by the claim that sustainable political transformation should be based on the agency of local people and complemented by global practices and knowledge, considering that the situatedness in the environment often limits people's perspectives (Mac Ginty, 2011). Scholars who study Russian civil society in all of its manifestations as well as Russian regional politics (Bindman, 2015; Bindman, Kulmala, & Bogdanova, 2019; Evans, 2014, 2016; Henderson, 2002, 2011; Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010; Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017) have also impacted my thinking about this research topic. Specifically, they have advocated for a more nuanced understanding of the civil society forms and the challenges civic activists encounter in Russian regions. Finally, democratization theories (Lewis, 1997; Stepan & Linz, 2013; Way, 2014) have also been motivating but in a different way. In the context where a significant number of Russian citizens believes that they already live in a democratic state (Levada Center, 2015; Volkov & Goncharov, 2015) and the rest of the population see democracy as synonymous to the anarchy of the "the wild and evil '90s" (Ilsiyar, study participant), the role of definitions used by democratization theorists (e.g., democracy, civil society) becomes increasingly important.

The academic interest in the local visions of civil society has been influenced by the personal experiences of my native region's successes and challenges in advancing a vibrant civil society agenda. My first exposure to civic activism happened in August 1991 on my first trip to Moscow where my parents and I witnessed mass protests that soon resulted in the breakdown of the Soviet Union. I found that those first images of barricades, tanks, and crowds became synonymous with civil society activism for years to come. All these symbols of popular protest at that time felt exciting and liberating, largely due to my parents' encouragement and the fact that I had never witnessed nonviolent activism on the ground. I could never imagine that those elements of dissent and nonviolent civil disobedience would be marred with violent repression.

Shortly afterward, I observed demonstrations in Kazan in favour of Tatarstan's succession from the Russian Federation led by the prominent leaders of nationalist organizations that were soon followed by the images of the first Chechen war on television. Nationalism and dissent, freedom and identity crisis, and apathy and disillusionment with the economic reforms were only a few points on the long list of new pressures that baffled my parents' generation. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new generation has grown up in Russia. Influenced by both neoliberal values and the tightening of the authoritarian political regime's grip on power, it has been trying to figure out its view on civic activism. When I started to volunteer in my early twenties, the idea of unpaid community work surprised my friends at the time. It took, however, only a few years for volunteerism to become accepted by young people as a key norm, adding new meaning to civic activism. There were 57,832 registered[1] volunteers in Tatarstan in 2019 ("Our team got bigger," 2019) compared to only 5,147 in 2007 (Gordeeva, 2018).

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[1] Although volunteers can register with the government-run volunteer centre, a lot of people volunteer without registration.

"Do we even have a civil society in Russia?" – a friend who is an immigrant to Canada asked me when she heard about my research. "Of course, civil society exists!" – is an opening sentence for almost every story of civic activism in this study. The differences in the reaction between locals and a member of the diaspora illustrate that civil society in Russian regions is often misunderstood and its impact on the everyday lives of local people is underestimated owing to the insignificant reflection on the federal, let alone international, levels. Therefore, research on civil society has to consider the experiences of people living in the environment, their struggles and aspirations, in other words, people have to "imagine" the society in which they want to live (Lederach, 2010).

Study focus and objectives

To explore the role of civil society, this exploratory case study data was collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews with civil society activists in Tatarstan, and field notes were constructed to observe the interaction dynamics and remain reflexive during the interview process. Reflexivity was also in line with the research methodology and helped to refine the process of data collection and analysis. Interview questions, detailed in Appendix 5, were drafted to pursue several objectives. First, the study investigated how Tatarstan's civil society activists understood the role of civil society in the governing process. The term civil society was selected for the introduction letter above other terms (for example, nonprofit sector, voluntary sector) for its prevalence in the Russian civil society literature. Moreover, this term is commonly used in the Russian language and was familiar to all study participants. Nevertheless, I deliberately did not provide prior definitions; participants were encouraged to use any term to describe their activism and, in doing so, to define civil society.

Second, the research examined the relations between the local people and CSOs. Local people's participation in civil society activities in Russia have been explored in public opinion polls (e.g., Levada Center, 2018); however, those numeric values provide little explanation of local people's tendencies to participate in CSOs. Therefore, the choice to interview civic activists was compelled by their first-hand knowledge of public engagement, as well by my enthusiasm to understand civil society's best practices in mobilizing support. Equally important was the study participants' outreach activities, which allowed me to collect information on civil society beyond the capital city of Kazan.

The third objective was to analyze the relations between civil society and the state. In the case of Tatarstan, this objective required exploring the relations with the federal and local governments. State – civil society relations in Russia have been mostly studied as a juxtaposition of contention and collaboration (Cheskin & March, 2015). Therefore, my goal was to explore what nuances may exist and how they intersect in practice.

Finally, the study has assessed previous civil society strategies in governance and transformation and outlined possible solutions for improvement in Tatarstan's civil society based on the knowledge of my study participants. The focus on the experiences of Tatarstan's civil society activists was encouraged by the months of researching their activism in the media, following civil society groups on social media, and discussing the application of PACS theories to the Tatarstan context with my research supervisor, Dr. Byrne. The interviews with study participants further confirmed that the local ownership and middle-range leadership approaches were particularly relevant to the research environment.

Study significance

Researchers and activists worldwide continue to raise awareness about the ongoing federal government's assault on civil society in Russia (Brechenmacher, 2017). Tatarstan's civil society activists continue their everyday work to improve the situation on the ground while continuing to live in a restrained political environment. In contrast to the members of Russia's political establishment who suppress civil society, the names and successes of civil society activists outside Moscow rarely make it into the headlines. This omission happens not out of fear of civic activists, who are willing to showcase their work, but due to the limited access to their stories outside of the Russian-language social media[2]. Thus, insufficient attention is given to the experiences of civil society activists and the impact they have on political transformation and governing structures in Russian regions. This makes a case study of this kind even more pressing.

Tatarstan has been a special case amongst other Russian regions. It enjoyed a greater independence before its powersharing agreement with the federal centre expired in 2017. Tatarstan is also one of the wealthiest Russian regions and allocated significant government funding to the nonprofit sector. As a result, the conditions for the development of the civil society sector in Tatarstan were quite unique. On the one hand, political CSOs were inspired by the victories of the early nationalist organizations, and on the other hand, socially oriented CSOs flourished because of government support. The current political developments in Tatarstan (and Russia in general) make the case of Tatarstan's civil society even more valuable in uncovering the diversity of local civil society forms.

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[2] The new bill supported by Russian Duma in April 2019 may limit their outreach even further. The bill allows Russia to create its autonomous Internet, see, e.g., Agence France-Presse (2019).

This exploratory case study is important to understand the local dynamics of civil society that have developed in Tatarstan, and to suggest locally sustainable approaches to civil society participation in political transformation and in governance structures. In Russia, transformation efforts often get subverted by a weak civil society (Evans, 2011) that is unable to prevent the "turn toward authoritarianism" (Johnson & Saarinen, 2011, p. 41). Local civil society activists hold the key to understanding the root causes of this subversion and to envisioning practical tools of everyday people's resistance to power.

Thesis outline

This thesis consists of nine chapters. The majority of themes and sub-themes discussed in these chapters intersect with each other. This overlap is, on the one hand, due to the research design in which study participants were guided by my probing questions yet were encouraged to reflect on their related experiences and provide diverse examples of their own choices. On the other hand, I also attempted to look at the overlapping themes from various perspectives and integrate all possible layers into the discussion. To these ends, this thesis has the following structure:

The first chapter is the introduction. It provides preliminary background information and clarifies the focus and significance of the study. In the second chapter, I briefly introduce the historical, political, and economic context in which civil society in Russia had developed. Specifically, the chapter introduces the origins of Russia's civil society, including the local and international influences it experienced both prior to its official inauguration after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and during Putin's administration. This chapter also discusses constitutional

and legal foundations that have shaped civil society into its current forms, especially in terms of the specific case of Tatarstan's civil society.

The third chapter includes a theoretical literature review that provides a framework for the study, particularly, for the empirical chapters five through eight. The literature review encompasses four main groups of literature. The first looks into the definitions and the role of civil society in the liberal and emancipatory PACS models, including democratization theories and (neo)liberal peacebuilding theories. The second reviews the literature on state – civil society relations, in particular, governance theories and their theoretical application to the research of state – civil society relations in Russia. Third, this chapter looks into the concepts of agency and local ownership in order to theorize local participation. Finally, this chapter compiles theoretical approaches to civil society and change, specifically, the theories of power and the middle-range leadership approach.

The fourth chapter discusses the study's research methodology. It elaborates on the grounded theory methodology, sampling technique, and the description of the research participants. Further, it discusses the research instrument, the researcher's positionality, research validity, and project dissemination. Considering the specifics of the research site, I pay close attention to anonymity and confidentiality measures.

Next, chapter five presents an exploration of local civil society activists' understandings of civil society in Tatarstan. It analyzes two conflicting local definitions of civil society and the division within the civil society sector into political, socially oriented, and independent civil society groups. It proceeds to inquire as to what impact the historical development of the civil society sector in Tatarstan has had on its current shape.

Chapter six explores participants' views on state – civil society relations in Tatarstan. It deliberates on several directions suggested by my study participants in their relations with the state, namely, the mechanisms of communication available to civil society organizations and groups in Tatarstan, the government's co-optation strategies that target the non-compliant civil society activists, and the government's enforcement measures which often follow the actions of civil disobedience. Additionally, the study participants demonstrate how they creatively navigate the system to advance their agendas.

In chapter seven, the public support for civil society initiatives in Tatarstan is investigated. The sub-sections in this chapter include key trends of civil society activists' local participation in Tatarstan, such as online participation and the dominance of certain groups in CSOs. The recruitment and representation of civil society groups and the issue of government dependency are also reviewed.

Following the discussion of the impediments to civil society activism in the previous chapters, chapter eight presents visions for the future as narrated by my interviewees. They outlined several venues where change was needed, namely within the civil society sector, in their relations with the government, and with the general population. The chapter also details the conditions under which this transformation will become possible. Each empirical chapter ends with discussions and findings.

The thesis concludes with chapter nine, which discusses the key grounded theoretical concept of divided civil society, the overall key findings of the study as well as its limitations, and the implications for theory and practice.

Conclusion

This introduction provides a brief overview of the study and its preliminary background, and specifies the research objectives and the study's focus. The value of this research and the thesis structure are also outlined. To situate the study in the historical, political and socioeconomic environment of Tatarstan, I discuss the research context in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Local context: Historical, constitutional, and political foundations of civil society in Tatarstan

Introduction

This chapter seeks to explain the complexities of the environment, in which civil society in Tatarstan operates. The purpose of the context overview is to trace political, economic, legal, and social trends in Russia, and more specifically in Tatarstan, and their impact on the development of civil society. The current shape of the civil society sector in Tatarstan is rooted in its political and economic structures, designed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and supported by the constitutional framework. Since then, however, these structures have been challenged and adapted by every political administration to reflect their agendas. Tracing historical transformations of civil society in Tatarstan/Russia outlines the research background and situates participants within the local setting.

Multiple studies have explored the causes and outcomes of post-Soviet transition in Russia (for example, Dyker, 2004; Fish, Gill, & Petrović, 2017; Rose, 2009). Therefore, this chapter's intention is not to reiterate historical facts but rather to connect the results of the post-communist transition to the formation of Tatarstan's CSOs. Both the Soviet experience and the subsequent political liberalization laid the ground for the present-day Tatarstan's civil society model. Understanding these processes may suggest insights for analyzing recent events.

Further, the roots of civil society's successes and challenges are necessary to locate in political and economic developments following Vladimir Putin's rise to power, and above all, Russia's oil trade dependency and its suppression of political opposition and dissent (see, for example, Etkind, 2018). Analyzing civil society also entails understanding the constitutional and

legal framework, which embodies the ideological foundations of the modern Russian state and supports current political structures. The complex intersectionality of the aforementioned factors was often implied rather than detailed by the study respondents. Therefore, it is crucial to uncover the hidden assumptions, originating from the participants' historical and cultural backgrounds.

In addition, Tatarstan's specific features need to be explored to understand the political and economic conditions that dictate forms and methods of civil society activism. Having identified themselves with the broader Russian civil society, all of the research participants shared with me their awareness of the regional differences. Despite the significant overlap with the federal tendencies to develop civil society, Tatarstan has benefitted from its unique status and designed local civil society forms. In particular, the recent cases of civil society engagement in Tatarstan demonstrate the trajectory of civil society transformation away from classic NGOs toward independent movements.

Table 1: The key facts about the Republic of Tatarstan

Tatarstan's demographics	
Tatarstan's population (2018)[3]	3 894 284
Kazan's population (2019)[4]	1 251 969
Number of ethnic groups[5]	173
Ethic distribution[6]	
Tatars	> 2 million (53.2% of the population)
Ethnic Russians	> 1.5 million (39.7% of the population)
Chuvash	116,200 (3.1% of the population)
Official languages	
Russian, Tatar	
Political institutions	
The head of the government	President (since March 2010 - Rustam Minnikhanov)
Parliament	The State Council (*Gosudarstvennii Soviet*)

[3] According to the Russian Statistics bureau (Rosstat). Retrieved from https://gks.ru/
[4] According to the Russian Statistics bureau (Rosstat). Retrieved from https://gks.ru/
[5] According to 2010 Russian census. Retrieved from http://tatarstan.ru/about/population.htm
[6] According to 2010 Russian census. Retrieved from http://tatarstan.ru/about/population.htm

Political parties [7]	
Edinaia Rossiia (The United Russia)	85 seats (out of 100)
KPRF[8]	6
SR[9]	1
LDPR[10]	1
Partiia Rosta[11]	1
Self-nominated[12]	6
Number of the registered nonprofits in Tatarstan[13]	
5 688	

In this chapter, I examine several issues that affect Tatarstan's civil society: (1) the impact of the local and global civil society forms on the development of civil society in post-Soviet Russia; (2) the strengthening of the authoritarian regime in Russia in the 2000s; (3) the role of the constitutional framework in crafting the Russian civil society model; (4) the role of civil society in Bolotnaya's popular protests of 2011-2012; (5) the contribution of civil society in Russia after the failure of the "white ribbon revolution" (2013-2018); and (6) Tatarstan's local characteristics and their influence on CSOs. Focusing predominantly on the past ten years, in this last section, I draw examples of the most prominent CSOs and movements in Tatarstan to illustrate the current shape of the civil society sector.

The origins of Russia's civil society: The local and the global

Researchers argue that Russia's civil society before the collapse of the Soviet Union existed in quasi civil society forms (Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013). The Soviet

[7] The party division is often nominal with no real opposition.
[8] The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (*Kommunisticheskaia partiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii*)
[9] A Just Russia (*Spravedlivaia Rossiia*)
[10] The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (*Liberalno-demokraticheskaia partiia Rossii*)
[11] The Party of Growth (*Partiia Rosta*)
[12] Candidates can self-nominate themselves and run independently. This is done to distance oneself from political parties (most often from the United Russia). In practice, independent PMs usually remain loyal to their leaders.
[13] These data are based on the statistics of the Public Chamber and reflects only socially oriented nonprofits. Retrieved from http://oprt.tatar/blog/spisok_nko/2018-04-04-195

Union's federal government largely controlled most types of civic engagement (such as, trade-unions and youth organizations). Although these formal organizations were not autonomous civil society groups, they fulfilled important functions, which were discontinued after the demise of the Soviet Union. At that point, some activists and organizations took it upon themselves to furnish some service-providing functions neglected by the newborn Russian state. These organizations had presented little interest to foreign donors and received limited funding domestically (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017) until Putin's administration increased efforts to regulate civil society and extended financial support to socially oriented organizations and government organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) (Tarasenko, 2015).

On the other side of the civil society spectrum, the first advocacy groups emerged during the later years of the Soviet Union. Compared to what happened in other Eastern European countries where civil society initiated the regime change, Soviet individuals and groups critical of the regime struggled to mobilize into civic movements (Evans, 2011). The most influential civic groups that advanced for the collapse of the USSR developed in the periphery, such as the nationalist movements in the Soviet republics (for example, in the Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) (Uhlin, 2005). Nevertheless, the 1960s-1980s were the most fruitful years for the development of the dissident movement in Russia, which arguably paved the way for the politics of *perestroika* and the regime's breakdown (Thomas, 2005). During the last years of *perestroika*, some of the activists organized into CSOs and social movements, such as the environmental movement (Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013), disarmament movement (Spencer, 2010), and the Human Rights Center "Memorial" (Memorial, 2019).

At the same time, before *perestroika* most of the dissident movement was not widely supported by the general public (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017). The human rights groups had

insufficient membership, rarely reaching beyond *intelligentsia* groups in Moscow and other major Russian cities (Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010). Spencer (2010) argues that the limited impact of dissidents on Russia's political transformation and the failure to institute a viable civil society sector was due to the lack of dialogue between dissidents and Communist party members, seeking change from above. In the later years of the Soviet Union, dissidents were the only independent civil society representatives – "the barking dogs," whereas the growing number of party members – "the termites" – also tried to establish CSOs (Spencer, 2010, pp. 5-35). Ultimately, "the termites" succeeded in advancing their agenda, pushing "the barking dogs" to marginal roles in the civil society sector. Until 1989, the majority of the population in Russia remained inactive before suddenly becoming engaged in "a fledgling civil society" (Spencer, 2010, p. 206). Nevertheless, the "fledgling" failed to unleash its potential, as the support for new forms of civil society in Russia was relatively low (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017), and people continued to rely on informal networks rather than the formal CSOs (Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013). Henderson (2002) believes that in addition to "the lack of the visible consistency," Western donors were also responsible for the failures of the "fledgling" civil society sector in Russia. In their funding arrangements, Russian NGOs became accountable to the donors rather than to the population (p.142).

The design of Russia's post-communist transition often referred to as failed democratization (e.g., Evans, 2011; Politkovskai͡a, 2005; Rose, Mishler, & Munro, 2011), has greatly determined the Russia's civil society model. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new government expedited economic and political reforms to meet the requirements of the neoliberal model.

Economically, liberalization included privatization in the form of "shock therapy" which resulted in the establishing of the neoliberal market rules that impoverished millions of people (Spencer, 2010). The transition to the neoliberal economic system was marred with corruption, whereas the transition itself hardly had any roadmap. There were also no institutions in place to support economic liberalization. Outside a small circle of neoliberalism supporters who had no clear vision for the transition, the market economy remained alien to the majority of Russians (Wilson, 2014). The elements of the Washington Consensus that were of primary importance for the population (such as the reduction of inflation) stretched throughout a number of years, while privatization was speeded up to benefit a few (Rutland, 2013).

Many former state enterprise directors managed to privatize these companies and get control over Russia's most valuable assets – natural resources. To illustrate this point, the Gazprom Corporation, which controls natural gas resources in Russia, was transformed from the Ministry of Natural Gas to Gazprom (Rutland, 2013). The overreliance on the export of natural resources has become emblematic of the Russian economic model.

Further, economic liberalization led to the dismantling of the Soviet welfare system (Bindman, 2015; Salmenniemi, 2014). In the Soviet Union, everyone had access to free healthcare, education, housing, and guaranteed employment. When social welfare moved down the list of priorities for the new state, the population had to substitute it with additional sources of income. The situation further deteriorated when criminal gangs started accumulating wealth and power, meeting little attention from the authorities (Satter, 2003) who would only intervene when corrupt oligarchs claimed political power as happened in the case of Mikhail Khodorkovsky (Sixsmith, 2010).

At the same time, critics assert that the transitional challenge was not merely economic as it was mostly political. Economic liberalization came in a package deal with democracy, which Russia could not handle (Åslund, 2009). Indeed, the Russian neoliberal model was very distinct from other neoliberal economic models, and the economic policies of the Washington Consensus were not designed to address the differences in Russia's post-communist transition. As a result, the corrupt privatization process benefitted a small number of oligarchs and created an unstable economic situation in Russia (Rutland, 2013).

Politically, the reforms resulted in the Communist party losing its status as a ruling party; civil liberties and political freedoms were declared in the constitution. However, Russia's political reforms were also short of democratization. Rutland (2013) writes that Russia had all pre-conditions for developing a "Swedish-style social democracy" (p. 349), but the economic and political reforms transitioned it into a capitalist undemocratic state with a strong nationalist agenda. The liberal democratic model prioritized electoral democracy, which helped the former Communist party elite to remain in power both politically and economically (Satter, 2003). At the same time, some individuals who benefitted from the reforms and became oligarchs (often, by using criminal means) were not the Communist party elite. Their political power came after their economic success in the early 1990s (Rutland, 2013).

The opposition to the economic and political reforms was immense. Economic liberalization which resulted in 1,600 percent inflation was one of the reasons behind the stand-off between President Boris Yeltsin and the Russian parliament[14] (Rutland, 2013, p. 341). The opposition was suppressed militarily in 1993 but numerous political parties remained in the new parliament, which Yeltsin's administration had to tolerate. In particular, the Communist party of

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[14] At the time, the Congress of People's Deputies.

the Russian Federation (CPRF) continuously challenged new policies. Communist ideology and the memory of the Soviet past remained strong during the early 1990s. Arguably, the CPRF's leader had chances to win presidential elections in 1996, if it was not for Yeltsin's unfair campaigning and election fraud (Mendras, 1997).

Meanwhile, Russia's civil society remained weak (Evans, 2011) and could neither effectively support democratic reforms nor provide adequate services to the population. Ljubownikow and Crotty (2017) argue that the political and economic conditions for developing an independent civil society sector in Russia were unfavourable compared to other Eastern European countries. The advocacy organizations were not established based on popular demand for holding the government responsible. Instead, the reforms were a precondition to financial aid, and membership in the financial organizations and forums (Rutland, 2013).

Political and economic conditions determined the overreliance of the Russian human rights NGOs on foreign funding and their adversarial relations with the new federal state (Henderson, 2002). Conversely, the organizations that provided services had to compromise and maneuver their relations with the state. As a result, Russia's civil society incorporated a few liberal features that led to the creation of human rights organizations that were active, mostly, in the metropolitan areas. At the same time, the traditional features of civil society groups that existed under the tight political control of the Soviet regime, such as informal apolitical networks, persisted (Chebankova, 2015). In some ways, the newly constituted civil society sector resembled Soviet civic activity with its orientation on service provision and its lack of access to governance. In addition, a thin layer of human rights advocacy appeared. Above all, the incompatible values embodied in civil society organizations reflected the Russian political

regime, which, on the one hand, gained its legitimacy through elections and supported the market economy and, on the other hand, was highly bureaucratic and anti-Western (Sakwa, 2004).

In many ways, the post-communist transition in Russia resembled the liberal peace model that was later applied in the post-peace accord settings around the world. Similarly, it focused on economic liberalization, human rights, and electoral democracy (Donais, 2012). Furthermore, the reforms in Russia were selective fitting the needs of political leadership, instead of being designed for local conditions. Neoliberal enthusiasts equated the rules of economics to those of hard science. They believed that the same rules could be applied everywhere and ignored the fact that the Russian reformers were the same old Communist party leaders (Rutland, 2013).

The 2000s: The rise of authoritarianism

The rise of the authoritarian political regime in Russia began in the early 2000s; it fully emerged by 2010, culminating in the state's annexation of Crimea and the war with Ukraine in 2014 (Gel'man, 2014). Some researchers define this regime as "electoral authoritarianism" (Schedler, 2006) or a "hybrid regime" (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2013) because it preserves nominal democratic institutions, such as elections and the multi-party system. Others argue that Russia passed the stage of hybridity in the 1990s and by the 2000s had established "centralized authoritarianism" (Rutland, 2013, p. 351).

The major feature of an authoritarian regime is its instability: elections and public mobilization can either challenge the regime or uphold it. For instance, during the colour revolutions in neighbouring countries, the opposition used the regime's instability to challenge the authorities (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2013). In Russia, on the contrary, public mobilization is

effectively channeled by the regime and used to justify more stringent laws to regulate the civil society sphere.

The advancement of Putin's administration was tightly connected to the outcomes of earlier economic and political liberalization and stimulated by widespread corruption, Yeltsin's fraudulent elections in 1996, and the two Chechen wars. In this context, Putin was often seen as "a better deal" by Russians and his popular support often exceeded 70 percent (Spencer, 2010, pp. 244-245). After the economic and political instability of the 1990s, Putin proposed a system of "managed democracy" with the dominating pro-Kremlin political party (United Russia) and tight control over mass media, business, and civil society (Wegren & Konitzer, 2007).

In addition, by 2000 Russia had recovered from the 1998 economic crisis, which created favourable economic conditions for building a Putin-style strong state (Rutland, 2013). Historically, Russia has a long tradition of "strong state" regimes, in which short-term political reforms (both top-down and bottom-up) were overshadowed by the new authoritarian regimes (Tsygankov, 2014). However, despite his commitment to centralization, "Putin was arguably still more of an economic liberal than the average Russian" (Rutland, 2013, p. 353). Acting as a strong leader domestically, internationally Putin complied with the Global North's financial obligations, opening up Russia to the global economy. Above all, the strong state paradigm was favoured by the population owing to Putin's campaign against some of the most powerful Russian oligarchs (Sakwa, 2004, pp. 96-100) balancing their power with the aid of the *siloviki* – representatives of the security agencies. Although neoliberalism was not completely disregarded, the state assumed a powerful role in the economy (Rutland, 2013), leaving Russia "torn between market and state patronage" (Sakwa, 2004, p. 84).

Initially, Putin did not advocate abolishing democracy altogether and simply used the momentum to re-brand it in correspondence with the local people's understanding of it. Carnaghan (2007) argues that the majority of Russians think in terms of order versus anarchy, not democracy versus authoritarianism. Interestingly, many Russians believe that their country is already democratic, although they think it needs some improvements (Levada Center, 2015, p. 6).

There is a difference in how Russian citizens perceive democracy in comparison to their Western counterparts. On the one hand, the majority of the population believes that the leaders on all political decision-making levels should be elected, and they negatively react to any limitations on the right to vote. Almost half of the Russian population believes that there is a need to have a political opposition. At the same time, researchers have observed that many Russians give the same value to the social welfare system as they give to freedom of speech, and believe that social welfare system is a critical element of democracy (Volkov & Goncharov, 2015). Democracy does not necessarily accompany the liberal market economy. Many Russians also believe that the poor deserve support from the state, although they do not argue for the redistribution of wealth (Carnaghan, 2007).

These perceptions of democracy and the neoliberal economy have guaranteed popular support for the idea of "sovereign democracy," whereby Putin had proposed a more prominent role for the state in providing social services and taking on the responsibility to pay pensions, and to provide free healthcare and education (Richter, 2009). These political decisions were supported by the profits from high oil prices in the early 2000s. As the economic and social conditions slightly improved, the popular support for the government grew steadily.

Imperial sentiments in Russia also contributed to the support of the population for Putin. The collapse of the Soviet Union left the majority of Russians in denial about their colonial past and frustrated about the new role for their country in international affairs (Sakwa, 2004). The new administration used this mental paralysis to rehabilitate most of the Soviet past and to market new reasons for people to have national pride, such as winning the war in Chechnya and Georgia. At the same time, early in his career as president, Putin always highlighted Russia's connection to Western civilization (Sakwa, 2004) and partnered with Asian countries out of necessity after the international community's imposition of sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea.

As a part of his "strong state," Putin also advocated for enhancing the rule of law and for the federal government's leading role in this process (Sakwa, 2004). Whereas the former was met with overwhelming public support, the latter raised concerns. Putin's administration's first political decision was aimed at the internal centralization or, rather, re-centralization (Evans, 2014) of Russia's regions and the strengthening of the federal center. Notably, one of his first political decisions was to wage the second Chechen war in response to continuous insurgency in the Caucuses region. This war was also aimed at demonstrating to other Russian regions that the new administration would not tolerate any separatist behavior.

The centralization process was part of the plan to strengthen the so-called *vertical vlasti* ("the vertical of power"). In the early 2000s, this process included abolishing governors' elections and replacing them with Moscow-approved heads of regions to increase their dependence on Moscow (Wegren & Konitzer, 2007). The United Russian party's candidates dominated all other political parties in gubernatorial elections (Sharafutdinova, 2016). The governors responded with unconditional subordination, bargaining, or inertia, and eventually, the

federal government succeeded in instituting "hierarchical co-subordination" of the regions (Chirikova, 2010, p. 37). At first, most governors asked Putin to re-appoint them and they received an extension from him. Ultimately, the new governors were eventually selected by the federal center.

The success of the centralization policies varied depending on the region (Gel'man & Lankina, 2008). Some regions were more dependent on federal funding than others, which made them more vulnerable to submitting to the "vertical of power." Many governors were replicating federal policies and establishing their versions of "the single chain of command" in their regions (Goode, 2011).

Some Moscow-appointed governors were not native to the regions they governed even in the national republics[15] (Turovsky, 2010). The creation of the United Russia party back in 2000 restructured the party scene federally (Sakwa, 2004). By controlling the appointment of the governors the Kremlin accelerated the role of United Russia taking control of the regional parliaments (Wegren & Konitzer, 2007).

Russia's steady economic growth in the early 2000s concealed severe economic problems from the majority of the population. Despite economic liberalization, the overreliance on oil trade did not allow Russia to build a solid economic foundation. Etkind (2018) argues that the Russian government created a "petrostate" that relies not on taxes and human capital but on direct revenues from the oil trade. This state is corrupt, depends on foreign technology, and ignores the needs of its population. To remain in economic control, the "pertrostate" has to control the public sphere, deny its people democratic representation, and suppress any

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[15] The national republics are the federal entities in Russia that unite the territories of Indigenous ethnic groups (the so-called titular nationalities).

opposition. The "petrostate" is also highly patriarchal and praises itself for its hyper-masculinity, pushing women away from high-paying jobs and other economic and political opportunities.

Further, the government began to strategize its relations with the civil society sector. Between 2004 and 2005, the colour revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and other post-Soviet countries stimulated the development of a preventative strategy aimed to minimize risks for the Russian regime. Among others, this strategy included mechanisms for coopting CSOs into state-led forums. Concurrently, the term "foreign agents" was coined to describe foreign donors supporting human rights organizations in Russia (e.g., Open Society Institute) and Russian organizations receiving their support (Reichert, 2015).

Constitutional and legal framework

The Russian constitution was written in a specific historical environment that compelled specific provisions for developing the civil society sector. Placing these constitutional provisions into historical perspective demonstrates that the intentions of the post-communist transition in Russia were aimed at supporting the elite rather than democracy. Similar to other liberalization settings, where the interests of the elite did not always coincide with those of the rest of the population and resulted in the "façade of legitimacy" (Taylor, 2010, p. 162), the post-communist transition in Russia prioritized elite ownership.

The 1993 constitution affected civil society in Tatarstan in several ways. First, it has proclaimed rights and freedoms necessary for the conception and advancement of CSOs, such as the freedom of speech and assembly; the constitution explicitly guaranteed people the right to organize into CSOs. Human rights and freedoms were essential to the political liberalization process, and the Russian constitution abided by the universal conventions. In addition to

fundamental political rights and freedoms, the constitution integrated social welfare rights, free healthcare, free education, and access to housing ("Constitution of the Russian Federation," 1993). Further, the inclusion of social and economic rights into the Russian constitution was dictated by Soviet heritage and was deemed to balance out the impacts of economic liberalization.

The new liberal and old Soviet values (Chebankova, 2015) were, thus, accommodated in the constitution. Whereas Soviet values emphasized the welfare provision, the neoliberal principles encouraged nonprofits to compete for funding (Tarasenko, 2018). Nevertheless, the compromise between new and old values was rather declaratory and practical policies often sacrificed one or the other depending on populist demand. The unstable co-existence of these values was reflected in the creation of two different kinds of CSOs: human rights advocates and service providers.

Second, the constitution has opted for a presidential political system, reducing the power of the parliament ("Constitution of the Russian Federation," 1993). In designing its political system from scratch, Russia debated between introducing the presidential (like France) and parliamentary (like Britain) systems. The final choice of the presidential system was guided by the short-term goals of Yeltsin's administration to remain in power and moderate the opposition. Having defeated the opposition militarily in 1993, Yeltsin ensured that the political power was vested directly in a president by speeding up the adoption of the constitution. The constitution notes that a president is elected directly and parliament has no power to replace him or her except under an impeachment procedure. Sakwa (2004) argues that a "strong presidency in a weak state … created a whole range of power asymmetries and distortions" (p. 83). Although the presidential system is neither less democratic, nor permissive of the abuse of power, in the

Russian case, it hindered the enhancement of a newborn multiparty system. The abundance of small political parties on the political scene in the early 1990s fragmented the party system, making it confusing to Russian citizens. This fragmentation also impeded the development of a real opposition (Koesel & Bunce, 2012).

Since its inception, the presidential institute in Russia went beyond the president himself and included a wide web of formal and informal networks, including the most powerful oligarchs. After his rise to power, Putin sought to weaken the power of these influences and to increase his own personal power. In doing so, he relied on popular support and directly appealed citizens with his speeches (Sakwa, 2004). Additionally, the ambiguous wording of Article 81 of the constitution created a loophole for former presidents to stay in power after the completion of two terms. Instead of authorizing two presidential terms, the constitution (whether intentionally or not) has authorized not more than two consecutive terms ("Constitution of the Russian Federation," 1993), which formally allowed Vladimir Putin to run in the presidential elections for the third time.

Regional constitutions, including Tatarstan's constitution replicated the federal political system to a great extent. Together, the establishment of these political models was the first step toward eliminating the system of checks and balances and concentrating political power in the hands of the president. Considering the weakness of the judiciary, the executive branch soon acquired complete control over governance, including the issues related to CSOs.

The third constitutional principle that determined the specificity of civil society in Russian regions was its unique federalism. The constitution had laid the groundwork for a short-lived political decentralization, which allowed nationalist organizations to blossom in several Russian regions. In the early 1990s, when separatism was on the rise (Spencer, 2010), the federal

system was negotiated with the Russian regions to prevent further disintegration of the country. Chechnya and Tatarstan were the two Russian regions that demanded greater autonomy. Eventually, these two cases were resolved differently: Tatarstan negotiated a powersharing agreement, while Chechnya plunged into war.

The constitution stipulates that all regions (constitutionally, *subekty* – federal subjects) were divided into republics, territories, regions, federal cities, autonomous areas, and an autonomous region ("Constitution of the Russian Federation," 1993). The Russian constitution used two diverging approaches to the division of its federal subjects: territorial and ethnic, which led to further segmentation. The most problematic ethnic regions were Chechnya, Tatarstan, and the most problematic territorial – Kaliningrad[16] (Sakwa, 2004, p.133). This complex federal organization reflected different statuses and jurisdictions of the regions. Although the constitution has announced their equality, in practice, republics (also called national republics) were granted more power over their internal affairs, such as the right to institute their own state language and use it alongside Russian (Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016).

Each *subekt* of the federation adopted its own legislation in accordance with the federal constitution. Compliance with the Russian constitution also varied depending on the region. Initially, the national republics enjoyed more freedom in drafting their regional constitutions. Based on the 1991 Declaration of state sovereignty, Tatarstan's constitution defined the republic as a sovereign state ("Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan," 1992). This provision was not challenged until 2002 when the amendments to the constitution of Tatarstan declared the region to be a part of the Russian Federation. Moreover, the Republic had signed a treaty with Moscow

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[16] The Kaliningrad region (Kaliningrad oblast) is the only Russian exclave – a region geographically separated from the rest of the country.

on the delimitation of jurisdiction, which was renewed with amendments in 2007 before finally expiring in 2017 making Tatarstan the last national republic to lose its privileges.

These initial concessions to national republics were deemed necessary to avoid military conflicts within the federation. Russia's defeat in the first Chechen war further supported this tendency to avoid direct violence in settling conflicts with the national republics. At this time, CSOs supporting the nationalist agenda became handy for the local elites in negotiating favourable agreements with the federal government.

Certainly, the constitution alone cannot be held responsible for the misappropriation of political power. If applied in line with its spirit, the Russian constitution could have assumed a solid legal foundation for the promotion of democratization. However, violating the constitution by adopting anti-constitutional legislation became widespread in the 2000s. Other important changes to the legislation moved the country further away from the constitution's declared rights and liberties. The election legislation limited democratic freedoms related to voting rights. In particular, the minimal turnout and "against all candidates" options were removed (Wegren & Konitzer, 2007). Together with the abolishment of the governors' elections, this legislation reformed Russian political space without facing major protest from the general population.

In 2016, new anti-extremism legislation was adopted, increasing penalties for terrorism and extremism, which were very broadly defined. The legislation was nicknamed after the parliament member who proposed it – the "Yarovaya law." It limited fundamental constitutional rights and freedoms, including the freedom of speech. Under this legislation, people committing minor felonies (for instance, re-posting on social media) faced serious charges similar to those who committed lethal terrorist attacks (Kuznetsova, 2017). The anti-extremism law has been

overwhelmingly used against opposition leaders and civil society activists accused of undermining national unity by advocating for regime change.

The hyper-masculine nature of the Russian state later strengthened itself by issuing a number of anti-feminist laws. In 2017, a bill decriminalizing domestic violence was adopted by the Russian parliament. Abusers now faced fines rather than criminal charges (Ferris-Rotman, 2018). This legislation reflected a patriarchal view of the role of women in Russian society. Unsurprisingly, it went mostly unchallenged by civil society activists, in particular, in the traditionally Muslim regions, such as Tatarstan. Both patriarchal traditions and legislation continued to cement the roles of women in the civil society sector as apolitical caregivers, despite the evident involvement of women in all types of civil society activism.

Most importantly, the new regulation for the civil society sector has exposed the nonprofits that receive foreign funding to scrutinizing control and censorship, whereas the Public Chamber has become an institutional mechanism for implementing the new government's strategy in relation to civil society by administering government funding (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017). Since 2012, organizations that receive foreign funding must report themselves as "foreign agents" to the government. In addition, government grants are distributed to the organizations based on government interests (Zakharova, 2016), leaving many NGOs with no choice but to comply with the "foreign agent" label.

The "white ribbon revolution" (2011-2012)

In 2011-2012, the protests against election fraud swept across major Russian cities following Putin's intention to run in the elections for a third time. According to different sources, there were from 25,000 (Koesel & Bunce, 2012, p. 411) to between 60,000 and 100,000 rally

participants in Moscow (Etkind, 2018, p. 2). Prior to the protests, nothing indicated that people were willing to take to the streets. In public opinion polls, Russians demonstrated marginal interest in participating in the protests before the elections (Koesel & Bunce, 2012). However, the elections results were preceded by the anticipation that Putin might return to power triggered the mass protests. In December 2011, the protestors marched against the fraudulent victory of the United Russia party in parliamentary elections. The December protests were a surprise both to the regime and to analysts who assumed Russian civil society was inactive and Putin was highly popular (Koesel & Bunce, 2012).

In March 2012, then president Dmitry Medvedev eagerly vacated his office soon after the adoption of the constitutional amendment, changing the presidential term from 4 to 6 years (Koesel & Bunce, 2012). He also mentioned that he made an agreement with Putin to return the presidency to him after one term (Petrov, Lipman, & Hale, 2013). Putin's abuse of the constitutional provisions, which allowed him to run for the third time in the presidential elections strengthened the opposition's demand to end corruption in government (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2013). After the Duma elections, voters and observers filed multiple complaints alleging election fraud. Although the election fraud was comparable to what had happened in previous elections in Russia[17], in 2011-2012 social media assisted in facilitating the mass protests.

Social media has played a crucial role in protest mobilization. Civil society activists used social media to spread information and coordinate protests (Koesel & Bunce, 2012). Most of the rally participants learned the news from the Internet rather than from television (Nikoporets-Takigava & Pain, 2016). On Facebook, the opposition support reached 30,000; with at least

[17] For instance, in 1996 the results of the elections were falsified in favour of then-president Boris Yeltsin (reference).

25,000 people (according to police sources) participating in actual rallies (Koesel & Bunce, 2012, p. 411).

The protestors represented very different political views: liberal, communist, and nationalist. Similar to what occurred during the colour revolutions, the protestors chose a symbolic colour using white ribbons to symbolize purity in opposition to the corrupt Russian state. The protestors also adopted nonviolent techniques common to those used in other anti-authoritarian protests: silent marches (to show the violation of the freedom of speech) (Beumers, 2018), claiming spaces in central Moscow locations, and renouncing violence against police (Koesel & Bunce, 2012). Most notably, the protestors took over Bolotnaya square, which later gave its name to the protests. Many protestors showed up to the rallies with their families and young children to highlight the peacefulness of the protest. The protestors opposed the regime and Vladimir Putin personally.

However, the resemblance to the "Facebook revolutions" ended here. The majority of the protestors were representatives of the new *intelligentsia* or the so-called "creative class" – young well-educated and relatively well-off men and women residing mostly in Moscow, St. Petersburg and a few other Russian urban centers (Etkind, 2018). Political activism of young people also made these protests different from the protests that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which were led by mature *shestedesiatniki* – the generation of the 1960s (Gel'man, 2018). Economically, the protestors were better off than the majority of the Russian population; they were educated, home-owning Muscovites who lacked career prospects in Russia and faced the choice of whether to immigrate or to seek change (Etkind, 2018).

The critical difference of the 2011-2012 Russian "white ribbon" protests from other protests was the integration of political rather than purely economic demands (Reichert, 2015).

In the early 2000s, political protests were rare and were almost always against specific government decisions, such as the imposition of paid fishing and an increase in automobile import tariffs. Although some protests had a political component in the form of opposing widespread corruption, none were transformed into a broader social movement (Kramer, 2013).

The protests also presented a challenge to Putin's regime and reinvigorated "Russia's turn toward authoritarianism" (Johnson & Saarinen, 2011, p. 41). Surprisingly, the reaction of the government was fairly tolerant, with only a few cases of protestors' detention and police brutality captured by the media (Koesel & Bunce, 2012). The protest movement was effectively countered by the authorities because it was unable to organize around one leader (Etkind, 2018). Mechanisms introduced to control the protest activity were diverse and included "voluntarism, compliance or co-optation, and coercion" (Reichert, 2015, p. 5).

Instead of using excessive force, the authorities responded with more nuanced tactics. For example, Putin accused the United States of plotting to encourage and support protest movements in Russia and campaigned against foreign funds going to support Russian NGOs. While complementing civil society for its vibrancy, Putin argued that it was misled by foreign-paid instigators (Koesel & Bunce, 2012). The measures against "foreign agents" received popular support (Chaisty & Whitefield, 2013). Counter-rallies were organized by state-sponsored organizations. Putin's supporters exploited the fact that protestors had neither a united leadership nor a comprehensive program of social change. Their main message was that there was no alternative candidate in presidential elections who would be as qualified in this role as Vladimir Putin. Their slogan ("If not Putin, who?") later became a part of Putin's election campaign. Simultaneously, the Kremlin encouraged CSOs to participate in governance, of course, within the government-created framework (Koesel & Bunce, 2012). To regulate the civil society sector,

new institutional arrangements for the state – civil society interaction were created, including the All-Russia People's Front (Henderson, 2011).

Tested during the 2011-2012 protests, these mechanisms were further developed and integrated into state – civil society relations in Russia. Among others, voluntarism was advanced through pro-state organizations (e.g., Nashi[18]). Activists who had agreed to collaborate with the regime were offered platforms to voice their opinion (e.g., the All-Russia People's Front), whereas those remaining uncooperative faced arrest, detention, and trial.

Civil society organizations in Russia after 2012

The predictions that Russia would "follow the footsteps" (Koesel & Bunce, 2012, p. 403) of other post-communist countries after the 2011-2012 protests failed to materialize, and the country regained a sense of false stability for several more years. And yet, the protests were the early indicators of forthcoming problems, namely "the decline of oil and gas prices, … the seemingly unexpected invasions in Ukraine and Syria that led to … Russia's increasing isolation, and … the impoverishment of the people" (Etkind, 2018, pp.7-8).

After the 2011-2012 protests, civil society rapidly de-mobilized. It is important to note several features of Russian civil society during the post-Bolotnaya period. First, the apolitical nature of Russian civil society stands out. According to Epileva and Magun (2014), any civic activity has to be depoliticized to attract widespread support in Russia. The 2011-2012 protests challenged the total de-politicization of Russian society, which for a short while regained its value. However, the political protests remained very limited. Extreme individualism became a reaction to the pervasiveness of the public sphere and government-supported nonprofit

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[18] Nashi (Ours!) is a pro-government youth movement in Russia that self-declares as an anti-fascist democratic movement.

organizations. Today, members of volunteer organizations distance themselves from the "dirty" politics and believe they will have more of an impact remaining apolitical.

Second, the public nature of civil society was replaced by the individual activism of conscientious citizens. Local activists come together without having any specific agenda, which develops later through their activity. Informal networks continue to play an important role and allow people to be a part of the whole while remaining independent individuals. Although these networks are created with seemingly apolitical purposes, they often develop political claims. These local grassroots movements are prevalent in Russian regions and are driven by the "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) ideology (Epileva & Magun, 2014, p.72).

The majority of the civil society groups resignation from politics is deliberate (Epileva & Magun, 2014). Their apolitical and unorganized nature together with their voluntary resignation from the political space has become symbolic of Russian civil society. One of the reasons for the rapid de-mobilization of the Bolotnaya protests was their politicized nature from the very beginning, unlike the previous (and subsequent) mass protests that developed from social to political demands. The Bolotnaya protests participants were not ready for a serious conflict with the authorities (Epileva & Magun, 2014) so they retreated into the private sphere and created boundaries around it, resembling the experiences of Soviet quasi-civil society. Another resemblance to Soviet quasi-civil society is a minimal representation among political protestors; a typical profile of a Russian political protestor is a young, educated, atheist man (Patrusheva, 2013, p. 108).

Gabowitsch (2018) argues that the greater non-hierarchical networks in Russia are copycat movements that "represent ad hoc aggregations of individuals rather than displays of pre-existing ties" (p. 69). They attract individuals who were not previously engaged in civic

activity, yet they neither have a common goal and strategy, nor broad social support. Although they may have transformative potential, it has not yet manifested.

Third, after the Bolotnaya protests, the GONGOs have become a more prominent part of the civil society sector. Although the government had paid attention to non-political organizations and supported them through grants, after 2012, this support has risen. Pro-government organizations, such as the youth organization Nashi received special treatment (Reichert, 2015). The support to service providers has also increased dramatically (Tarasenko, 2018).

The Republic of Tatarstan (Tatarstan)

In spite of the national trends, many local contexts exist in Russia. Hence, Evans (2014) warns against generalizing civic activity across Russia. She argues that focusing solely on federal institutions ignores the diversity of civic participation and other regional tendencies. Although Tatarstan has experienced similar political and economic processes as the rest of Russia, it represents a unique case among other Russian regions.

Tatarstan (or, constitutionally, the Republic of Tatarstan) is one of the national republics in Russia. Tatars are the largest ethnic group in the region and ethnic Russians[19] are the most extensive minority group (37 percent of the population). Although Tatarstan's territory is relatively small (68,000 km2), it occupies eighth place in Russia in terms of the number of voters. Moreover, it has one of the most significant political influences on federal affairs (Mikhailov, 2010).

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[19] In Russian, two different words are used to describe nationality (rossiianin) and ethnicity (russkii). Here, I use the term Russian to refer to nationality and specify ethnicity (as 'ethnically Russian') if necessary.

Political and business elites in Tatarstan are tightly connected; they are predominantly male, ethnically Tatar, and they are from rural areas (or small towns). Initially, more than half were the former members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Salagaev, Sergeev, & Luchsheva, 2010). Tatarstan's political elite also dominates the republic's natural resources and other key industries, and cronyism is common so that they can sustain their control over Tatarstan's valuable assets (Sharafutdinova, 2010).

In its political development, Tatarstan has blended federal tendencies and regional features. On the one hand, in the highly centralized Russian state, the vast territory was governed by the same rules except for the periods of civil wars and unrest. Thus, Tatarstan has developed in the similar historical tradition as the rest of the country when in 1552 the Russian Tsar Ivan IV ("the Terrible") conquered it. To date, the Republic of Tatarstan politically resembles other federal subjects in Russia. On the other hand, the existence of national statehood before colonization helped to mobilize popular support for Tatarstan's sovereignty project, which "is still alive and well" (Graney, 2016, p. 1). Once a powerful competitor to the young Russian state, the Khanate of Kazan offered Tatarstan's political elite a historical reference for reviving Tatar identity and nationalist sentiments.

Several factors account for the specific characteristics of Tatarstan. In the early 1990s, Tatarstan developed its agenda for political and economic development. This agenda became possible after the famous speech in August 1990 by Boris Yeltsin, who was then Chairmen of the Supreme Council of Russia and campaigned to become Russia's first president. When visiting Kazan, Yeltsin encouraged regional authorities to "take as much sovereignty as you can swallow" (Sakwa, 2004, p. 131). In these last months of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin was looking for political benefits from decentralization. Under his presidency, for a short while, Russia

became "a federation of mini states," with Tatarstan becoming "an autonomous enclave within Russia" (Sakwa, 2004, p. 131).

Albeit federal decisions impacted its local politics, Tatarstan was the pioneer in institutionalizing state – civil society relations by establishing a "vertical of power." Already in the 1990s, when multiple parties contested each other in the federal parliament, the former party leaders in Tatarstan held firm to their power. Local authorities volunteered in suppressing political opposition on the regional level and falsifying the results of both federal and regional elections. The first president of Tatarstan – Mintimer Shaimiev – had no political opponents in the elections, running not to compete but to obtain a vote of confidence from Tatarstan voters (Mikhailov, 2010).

Gel'man (2010) contends that Tatarstan has developed a sub-national form of authoritarianism. Moscow supported the authoritarian political regime in Tatarstan as one of the regional pillars of the federal government, and the "vertical of power" established in Tatarstan was later promoted by Putin's administration for all of Russia (Mikhailov, 2010). The so-called Tatarstan model presented an exclusive federal arrangement (Nizamova, 2016) suggesting that federal elites consider the republic a leading and reliable region (Yusupova, 2016).

Unsurprisingly, Tatarstan's nationalist CSOs flourished in the early 1990s when they were inspired by the Chechen example because they advocated for the region's secession. For a short while, these organizations dominated the civil society sector in Tatarstan. According to Yusupova (2016), Tatarstan became "Russia's most nationalist republic" (p. 86). President Shaimiev, although formally independent, upheld nationalist organizations. Together with nationalist organizations, Islamic organizations were established and supported by the elite.

Organizations like Ittifaq[20] and VTOTs[21] argued that Tatars had rights for Tatarstan's territory and threatened Moscow with secession. Nationalist organizations initiated the reconceptualization of Tatar history and its colonial relations with Russia, and their ideas soon gained popular approval.

The government's support of the most radical nationalist organizations, however, had diminished after the signing of the federal treaty and soon after the authorities constrained their activism (Mikhailov, 2010). Nevertheless, the organizations that promoted Tatar language, culture, and Muslim organization have remained important representatives of Tatarstan's civil society sector. They have legitimized the Tatarstan elite (Yusupova, 2016) and the Tatar identity (Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016) and received special treatment.

In the 1990s, when the majority of Russians had a very vague idea of their role in civil society (Evans, 2014), the local environment was shaping civil society in Tatarstan significantly. In the civil society index on participation and overall trust in CSOs, Tatarstan's score was average (Mersiianova, 2009). Its special status was foremost reflected in the special budgetary arrangement (with Tatarstan paying only 50 percent of its revenues to the federal budget) and its ability to establish international relations bypassing Moscow (Sakwa, 2004). The budgetary arrangement, among other things, has guaranteed sufficient funding to CSOs, in particular, to the loyal socially oriented organizations.

In addition, sports events and mass celebrations led to the promotion of one type of civil society activism – sports events volunteerism. Tatarstan has invested more money than any other Russian region (except for Moscow) to support four popular sports teams (Mikhailov, 2010). With federal support, Tatarstan was financially capable of carrying out major sports events such

[20] The Tatar Party of National Independence (*Tatarskaia partiia natsionalnoi nezavisimosti*)
[21] The All-Tatar Public Centre (*Vsetatarskii obshchestvennii tsentr*)

as the 2013 Summer Universiade, 2015 World Aquatics Championship, and the 2018 FIFA World Cup (Sergeev, 2018).

At the same time, Moscow has slowly decreased the rights of the regions. In the early 2000s, the regions had to revisit their laws in compliance with the Russian constitution (Sakwa, 2004, p. 137). Changes to Tatarstan's constitution were made, surrendering its proclaimed independence to Moscow (Mikhailov, 2010). The establishment of federal districts further diminished the power of the national republics. Bypassing the constitution, Vladimir Putin created federal districts to combine several federal subjects to centralize governance further through Kremlin-appointed representatives. Nizhnii Novgorod, an ethnically Russian city, was chosen as capital of the Volga district, threatening Tatarstan's autonomy. Moreover, the new taxation system caused a decrease in Tatarstan's revenue (Sakwa, 2004). Beginning from what first appeared to be a backlash against Russian radical organizations such as the national Bolsheviks or Nazi skinheads (Kuznetsova & Sergeev, 2017), all nationalist organizations across the country were pushed to the margins of political life.

In 2010, Mintimer Shaimiev, the leader of Tatarstan since 1990, resigned and a new president Rustam Minnikhanov was elected. Unlike his predecessor, Minnikhanov was less successful in negotiating a better deal with Moscow. At the same time, the political climate in the country had changed, and direct elections of the governors were abolished shortly afterward. Although in 2015 Minnikhanov was re-appointed and even maintained his formal title as President of Tatarstan, the changes to the Russian political system impacted the region. The centralization of power in Moscow meant a revision of the treaty between Tatarstan, and the federal government and significant limitations were placed on its autonomy.

Economically, however, the region prospered for several more years. Shortly before Minnikhanov came to power, Tatarstan overcame the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis, which allowed better funding to socially oriented CSOs. Minnikhanov also expressed support to some independent civil society activists, most famously, to the protectors of Kazan's historical buildings. On the contrary, political organizations and movements became less affluent. The 2011-2012 protests in Kazan were smaller compared to Moscow and, similarly, lacked unified leadership. In contrast, the 2011 protests against paid fishing in Kazan attracted much broader participation ("Okolo 3 tys. rybakov," 2011).

Overall, social and economic protests in the last decade enjoyed more support than political dissent. Local authorities initiated regional legislation and fostered the Public Chamber and other top-down mechanisms to restrain protest activity in the region. On top of federal repression, Tatarstan's leadership often volunteered to initiate new restrictive measures. For instance, in 2016, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan ruled to terminate Agora, a Kazan-based human rights NGO ("Verkhovnii sud Tatarstana," 2016). This ruling was the first decision in modern Russian history to involve the closing down of a human rights organization on the grounds of its political advocacy.

After the Bolotnaya protests, Tatarstan's administration adjusted to the broader political tendencies, while trying to remain a powerful actor in its relations with the federal government. During the annexation of Crimea, Tatarstan's leadership actively promoted federal policies (Graney, 2016) and called for support for the Crimean Tatars. In 2017, Tatarstan's authorities came close to confronting Moscow over the most sensitive issue of teaching the Tatar language in the schools. Following Putin's speech, in which he asserted that all languages other than Russian in secondary schools should be electives rather than being mandatory, Minnikhanov

argued that Tatarstan would never cancel the regional requirement for mandatory Tatar classes (Antonov, 2017). However, he soon changed his position and reached an asymmetrical agreement with Moscow (Sergeev, 2018).

During the post-Bolotnaya period, the tightening of the civil society sphere has happened gradually. The year 2017 became especially challenging for civil society activism in Tatarstan. Tatar nationalist organizations felt betrayed by Minnikhanov's submission to the federal authorities. Political centralization encouraged protests both for and against mandatory Tatar language classes in the schools.

By 2017, the sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea started to have a measurable economic effect in Russia. In 2015, Tatarstan had also fully experienced the negative consequences of Russian sanctions against Turkey, which were introduced after Turkey shot down the Russian airplane22. It was particularly difficult for Tatarstan to forbid Turkish companies and citizens from working in the region. In addition to close ethnic and cultural connections among both of these Turkik peoples, Turkey had been the largest foreign investor into Tatarstan's economy (Sharafutdinova, 2016). All negative economic effects combined led to a situation that socially oriented organizations, even those outside the "foreign agents" list, faced greater challenges with funding ("Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo Tatarstana," 2017). The worsening economic situation was behind most of the recent civil society protests. Although Russian banks were coping with external sanctions fairly well in 2014-2015 (Pitalev, 2015), in December 2016 one of the largest and most reliable banks in Tatarstan – Tatfondbank – announced bankruptcy (Sergeev, 2018). This event spurred mass protests from bank depositors who were mostly small

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22 In November 2015, Turkish aircraft shot down a Russian military airplane that allegedly crossed the Turkish-Syrian border. At that time, both the Russian and Turkish military forces were actively involved in the Syrian conflict. The incident of shooting down the airplane worsened diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries, including a temporary ban on Turkish goods and labour contracts for Turks working in Russia.

entrepreneurs, desperate to rescue their small savings. As the government of Tatarstan was one of the main Tatfondbank investors, economic protests soon threatened to become political. Economic reasons were behind the protests of the subsidized mortgage holders, who had waited for years to move into their new homes ("Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo Tatarstana," 2017). Civil society activists protecting the environment and heritage buildings also challenged Tatarstan's authorities' economically motivated decisions. Whenever the contractors, tightly affiliated with Tatarstan's political elite, attempted to build housing in the protected areas or to create a potentially dangerous infrastructure, civil society groups self-organized in protest. In 2018-2019, economically motivated protests in Tatarstan continued and environmental protests expanded to include suburbs, such as Derbyshki (Grigoreva, 2019). In general, Tatarstan's civil society sector's political wing was less active than the spontaneous independent groups. Since 2014, the most active political CSO in Tatarstan was the regional branch of Alexey Navalny's organization. During presidential elections, all of the extra-parliamentary groups increased their activism, campaigning against Putin. They also used social and economic grievances to organize protests such as it was in the case of the pension reform protests in September 2018 (Meshcheriakov, 2018).

Conclusion

The development of Tatarstan's and, more broadly, Russia's civil society has a short, yet dynamic history rooted in the local milieu. This environment has determined the methods used by Tatarstan's CSOs to promote their agendas, as well as the institutional forms of these organizations. Civil society originated both from liberal foundations and inherently Russian values, which have the potential to complement and reinforce each other. Often, however, these

values collided with each other to promote only one type of CSO. In the 1990s, liberal human rights NGOs experienced greater international and domestic support, while economic grievances kept the majority of the population indifferent to them. The Russian constitution attempted to compromise these competing values yet fell short of withstanding the corruption and interference of the political elite.

As the political regime in Russia changed, government pressure on political and human rights organizations increased. The people who were eager to trade off seemingly illusive political freedoms for the prospects of economic stability and social welfare initially supported Vladimir Putin's rise to power. Subsequent developments proved that those promises were equally misleading. In 2011-2012, the first mass protests after the collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrated the weaknesses of civil society protest in Russia. Since then, CSOs and nonviolent social movements have had to adapt their methods to the local environment. In Tatarstan, civil society groups encountered difficulties similar to other CSOs stretched across Russia. At the same time, the political and economic development of the region distinctively shaped civil society in Tatarstan.

The next chapter presents the literature review for the study of civil society in Tatarstan and provides a theoretical foundation for the empirical chapters.

Chapter 3

Literature review. Civil society in political transformation and governance: A multidisciplinary evaluation

Introduction

This chapter identifies theoretical foundations for investigating the role of civil society in political transformation and governance in Tatarstan. To build a theoretical framework, a multidisciplinary approach advocated by PACS researchers (Byrne & Senehi, 2009; Galtung, 2009; Matyók, 2011; Richmond, 2010a) is applied, integrating PACS theories and concepts and Post-Communist studies scholarship. Traditionally, PACS scholarship has focused on the causes of social conflicts and on practical ways to transform these conflicts to build more peaceful and just societies. In particular, PACS literature has reviewed liberal peacebuilding in post-peace accord environments to identify common mistakes and offer transformative solutions. These theoretical approaches have been applied in studying and transforming violent conflicts and oppressive regimes.

In this thesis, PACS concepts and approaches are applied to the context of Tatarstan, which has never been a site for international peacebuilding, however, it has experienced similar democratization strategies the results of which were short of democratic transformation. The Post-Communist Studies research is integrated into this theoretical framework to provide insights on the role of civil society in the governing process in Russia; its challenges and opportunities (both historically and at present), regional dimensions, and relations with the state. This literature also reflects the most current political and economic developments in Russia on federal and regional levels.

The outline of this chapter corresponds to the main themes of the empirical chapters and facilitates the exploration of key thesis findings. The theoretical framework is divided into four main sections. The first section explores the meanings of civil society in democratization theories and their critique to review the design and strategy of political democratization and economic liberalization in the post-Cold War era. In particular, this section examines theories of democratic transition in Eastern Europe (Vachudova, 2015; Welzel, 2013; Zavadskaya & Welzel, 2015; Gherghina, 2014), the role of civil society in the practical application of democratization theories (Huntington, 2009; Kollmorgen, 2013; Munck, 2011, 2016; Sharp, 2010), and the debates relating to democratization failures in post-communist environments (Evans, 2011; Henderson, 2002; Spencer, 2010). In this section, PACS (neo)liberal and post-liberal peacebuilding models are also explored (Paris, 2010; Richmond, 2011a; Taylor, 2010; Thiessen, 2011) to offer theoretical insights into the successes and failures of civil society in political transformation. This second group of literature aims to offer a theoretical overview of the alternative understandings of civil society in non-Western contexts and the limitations of these alternative interpretations.

The second section provides theoretical insights into state – civil society relations. It elaborates on governance theories (Jessop, 1998; Peters, 2011), including the concept of good governance (Kluczewska, 2019; Mkandawire, 2007; Schirch, 2016; Watkins, 2004) and co-governance (Levasseur, 2018a; Levasseur & Frankel, 2016; Phillips, 2012). This section also explores civil society research in post-communist Russia. In particular, it focuses on the bodies of literature that investigate both contestation (Etkind, 2018; Evans, 2012; Gel'man, 2014, 2015; Nechai & Goncharov, 2017; Yatsyk, 2018) and cooperation (Bindman, 2015; Bindman, Kulmala, & Bogdanova, 2019; Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013; Ljubownikow & Crotty,

2017; Silvan, 2015), tendencies of state – civil society relations in Russia, as well as the regional characteristics of Tatarstan (Faller, 2011; Nizamova, 2016; Sergeev, 2008; Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016; Yusupova, 2016).

The third section reviews theories that explain the role of local engagement in governance and political transformation. Specifically, it explores popular mobilization for democratic transitions (Coelho & Von Lieres, 2010; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; VeneKlasen & Miller, 2007). In this section, PACS theories provide a framework to deconstruct the concept of participation in liberal models and to analyze local ownership and agency (Byrne et al., 2019; De Coning, 2018; Donais, 2012, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2014; Mitchell & Richmond, 2011; Özerdem, 2014; Pugh, 2011; Richmond, 2011b; Shinoda, 2015).

The last section reflects on theoretical and practical approaches to locally owned sustainable transformation. It discusses the concept of power (Boulding, 1990; Chinn, 2013) and the sources of power available to civil society and the responsibility of civil society in empowering local populations (Cortright, Greenberg, Stone, & Milovanovic, 2016; Foran, 2012; Lederach, 2016; Van Tuijl, 2016). Further, it elaborates on the practical forms of transformation, including social movements (Davis, 2002; Engler & Engler, 2014; Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2013; Nepstad, 2013). Finally, in exploring theories of change, this section examines the role of civil society as a "middle-range leadership" (Lederach, 1997) and as a "web" approach (Lederach , 2010).

Civil society in liberal and emancipatory models

Initially, civil society was "a product of Western culture" (Post & Rosenblum, 2002, p. 19). Several broad perspectives have affected civil society research in non-Western countries, in

particular, those transitioning from violent conflicts or/and authoritarian regimes. The first approach views civil society in these contexts as developing or underdeveloped by comparing it to civil society models in established democracies. This externally defined model understands civil as a combination of specific nonprofit organizations, such as human rights NGOs vital for democracy-promotion (Cory, 2010; Salmenniemi, 2014). Another perspective allows a more complex and context-related interpretation of civil society and its relations with the state (Fowler, 2010) and argues that being a product of democratic evolution, civil society emerges from interaction (Habermas, 1996) and is measured by quality, not quantity (Shestopal et al., 2012, p. 126). This approach, too, builds upon democracy as a normative foundation of civil society. In Eastern European post-communist transitions, civil society was mainly understood as a public sphere (Silvan, 2015) that provides a space for transforming oppressive structures (Spurk, 2010).

These groups of definitions have stimulated civil society research in democratization and liberal peace theories. The normative definition, in particular, was advanced by liberal peacebuilding, suggesting that civil society and democracy complement and reinforce each other (Paffenholz, 2010). Despite addressing several important dimensions of civil society, all three approaches struggled to explain the dynamics of CSOs in many non-Western contexts (Spurk, 2010). Emancipatory peace theory attempted to re-think the definition of civil society, acknowledging that, first, the presence of NGOs does not guarantee peace (Özerdem & Lee, 2016; Donais, 2012) and, second, that liberal civil society forms may not hold the same value as the local everyday forms (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019; Mac Ginty, 2014). These theories are reflected in the democratization, liberal peacebuilding, and emancipatory peace literature.

Democratization theories. This first body of literature focuses on the democratic

transition and the role of civil society in it (Huntington, 2009; Kollmorgen, 2013; Munck, 2011, 2016). Democratization theories date back to the research of economic modernization and its impact on establishing stable democracies (Dahl, 1982, 1989; Lipset, 1960). The early works on democratic transformation in Eastern Europe, most famously by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead (1986), were inspired by the shifts in communist regimes and built upon the previous democratization experiences in Latin America and Southern Europe (Lewis, 1997). Later, the scholarship on democratic transition in Eastern Europe was complimented to include more recent cases of subverting autocratic regimes and the role of external actors in them (Vachudova, 2015; Welzel, 2013; Zavadskaya & Welzel, 2015; Gherghina, 2014).

Initially, the researchers of democratic transition attempted to formulate an overarching theory that would explain the successes and failures of democratization projects around the world (Linz & Stepan, 1996). To this end, democracy was defined in electoral terms as a political regime with fair and free elections (Schumpeter, 2012). In addition to economic modernization and political pluralism in former authoritarian regimes, some argued for the re-establishment (or creation) of civil society (Schöpflin, 1990). Along with civil rights and political competition, such characteristics as active participation, accountability, and representation of women were added to the list to ensure the quality of democracy offered (Munck, 2016).

Further, the democratization literature has offered practical solutions to transform authoritarian regimes (Foran, 2012; Sharp, 2010). The practical focus of democratic transformation theories illustrates that they are political projects rather than a purely social science theory (Pickel, 2002). Despite their practicality, these theories were accompanied with

religious vocabulary, depicting democracy as a normative value or even a "faith" (Deneen, 2005). The supporters of civil society congruence argued for excluding the uncivil forms of civic activity (Post & Rosenblum, 2002, pp. 11-15). In other words, when the results of democratic transformations were short of high normative standards, their advocates struggled to explain theoretical inconsistencies. The modernization foundations in post-communist democratization were widely contested (Przeworski, 2000; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997) so that "the impact of economic development on democratization is significant, but it is conditional" (Kennedy, 2010, p. 797). While democratization theories made implicit correlations between civil society and political democratization, the role of civil society was seen mainly as instrumental (Baker, 2002). The transformative role of civil society was overestimated, particularly in Eastern European countries (Fowler, 2010), and the limitations of civil society in other political contexts were ignored (Jamal, 2012).

To address these challenges, democratization research deconstructed and detailed multiple variables of successful democratic transitions and re-assessed their empirical implications. However, the theoretical value of economic liberalization in democratic political transformation remained unchallenged. Despite its failure in various contexts, theorists continue to believe that democratization has a chance to succeed beyond Eastern Europe. For instance, when the Arab Spring provided an impulse to re-evaluate democratization theories, Stepan and Linz (2013) argued that this has been the first real grassroots challenge to dictatorial regimes, which may over time bring democracy to the Middle East.

Above all else, civil society was an "important buzzword" and a significant democratization component in post-communist Russia (Salmenniemi, 2014, p. 38). International donors invested into newborn Russian NGOs to stimulate popular participation in the third sector

or, as Henderson (2002) puts it, "Western countries 'purchase' civic engagement and participation" (p. 140). The main theoretical debate related to post-communist democratization concerns the question of whether civil society is a pre-condition to democracy or a result of it. One view is that a democratic public sphere has to be in place to transform oppressive regimes. In other words, "a vibrant civil society is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for democracy" (Henderson, 2002, pp. 139-140). Thus, while resistance was effective in Eastern Germany and Poland, in other contexts (such as the former Soviet countries) it was unsuccessful (Evans, 2011; Nepstad, 2013). In contrast, some authors assert that civil society is a product of democracy (Shestopal et al., 2012) and gains power from strong political and economic systems (Fowler, 2010).

Both approaches have pointed to problematic aspects within the civil society sector in Russia. First, the democratic transition was attempted after a short popular mobilization period during the early 1990s without either active civil society involvement or strong organizational mechanisms (Gill, 2006). Second, there were structural limitations to civil society's progress in democratization (Spencer, 2010). These structures were not significantly challenged and they continued to exist well into Putin's presidency.

At the same time, this theoretical debate did not sufficiently explore the impact of the local environment and it simply embraced the promotion of Western-type liberal NGOs as intrinsically positive without questioning the deficiencies of applying this model to Russian realities. Specifically, for a variety of reasons these NGOs could not (and often did not want to) survive outside big cities, and sometimes, outside the capital, and this included their access to funding and decisionmakers, support from the *intelligentsia*, and speaking the language of human rights (Buxton, 2014). For a vast country, like Russia, the NGOs could not adequately

serve the majority of the population. Instead of developing local grassroots initiatives, the donor-driven and donor-dependent civil society was detached from local needs. In practice, NGOs were ingratiating themselves with Western donors, whereas the donors were pleasing their political administrations (Henderson, 2002).

To some extent, the early successes of post-communist transitions in Eastern Europe, which had become the training ground for economic liberalization, democratization, and the establishment of liberal civil society organizations also inspired liberal peacebuilding theory. Privatization schemes used in post-Soviet countries were also later applied in peacebuilding (Donais, 2012). Although not identical, liberal peacebuilding repeated the flaws of post-communist democratization and could be helpful in addressing similar problems in other failed democratization contexts.

(Neo)liberal peacebuilding. According to democratization theorists, democratization "waves" (Huntington, 1991) started well before the collapse of the Soviet Union and continued after its demise. After the Cold War, the liberal peace model increased the intervention role of international institutions. Based on the proposition that democracies do not fight with each other (Pugh, 2011, p. 309), democratic peace embraced the liberal economic vision and was further developed by UN practitioners, such as the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (Stahn & Melber, 2014) and Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali (Paffenholz, 2010, pp. 44–47).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and democratic transitions taking shape in Eastern Europe the liberal peacebuilding paradigm expanded further, becoming the dominant paradigm in PACS (Mac Ginty, 2011). The ideologues of liberal peace have asserted that economic liberalization and modernization were indispensable components of peacebuilding (Donais, 2012). They believed that free markets would foster democracy that would create a more

peaceful world (Pugh, 2011). The economic component of liberal peacebuilding has also been defined as a free-market economy with a minimum role for a state social welfare system and privatization schemes similar to those used in the post-communist transition to democracy (Donais, 2012), which left the most vulnerable populations unprotected from extreme poverty (Pugh, 2011). In Russia, too, the privatization scheme benefitted a few, whereas the dismantling of the welfare system hurt many (Bindman, 2015; Salmenniemi, 2014).

Political democratization with a focus on a multiparty "free and fair" election process is another key element of the liberal political transformation (Özerdem & Lee, 2016). Due to the lack of resources, voter education, and other complications on the ground, these elections faced a variety of challenges including voter fraud and political corruption (Oberschall, 2007), leading to a "façade of legitimacy" (Taylor, 2010, p. 162). New electoral democracies are also not peaceful and frequently resort to violence (Babbitt, 2009; Kinsella & Rousseau, 2009). Democratization under the liberal peace umbrella has also included the promotion of civil society. As liberalism rests on individualistic and human rights values (Mac Ginty, 2011), professionalized NGOs, especially those working in the sphere of human rights, have been prioritized.

Overall, the liberal peace framework was linear (Ramalingam, 2013) and deterministic (Eriksen, 2009), presuming that the outlined steps would result in peace and democracy. In practice, however, the liberal peace has failed to effectively address the structural problems that led to oppression and conflict (Taylor, 2010), resulting in attempts "to transform Haiti into Denmark or Afghanistan into Switzerland" (Donais, 2012, p. 24). As the liberal peace framework was often detached from people on the ground (Richmond, 2011b, p. 420), its critics have argued that liberal peacebuilding is a form of modern-day colonialism (Mac Ginty, 2011; Cooper, Turner, & Pugh, 2011; Taylor, 2010). The agency of local people in this model was

"rhetorical" and rarely seriously considered (Richmond, 2011b, p. 420), which undermined the development of viable civil society forms.

Emancipatory peacebuilding. Having identified major democratization and liberalization inconsistencies within peacebuilding theory and practice, PACS researchers advocate for transforming them to promote local forms of peacebuilding. In particular, Lederach (1997) contends that conflict transformation needs to be owned locally and focuses on reconciliation and relationships. Conflict transformation theory asserts that sustainable peace can only be achieved by local people, local resources, and local visions of peace (Lederach, 1997, 2010). This approach has stimulated the re-evaluation of theoretical underpinnings of peacebuilding, although the practice of it remained largely unchallenged (Paffenholz, 2014).

One of the reasons for that was an oversimplified view of the "local" as a homogeneous group without any international influences (Simons & Zanker, 2014). Peacebuilders often assumed that this group once had unique local peacebuilding practices, which could be authentically "resurrected" by international peacebuilders (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 62). PACS scholars warn against this oversimplification and romanticizing of local peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond, 2011b; Tadjbakhsh, 2010). They argue that local groups are always fragmented (Simons & Zanker, 2014) and traditional forms of conflict resolution can potentially support structures of privilege, oppression, and exclusion such as patriarchy (Özerdem & Lee, 2016; Mac Ginty, 2011).

In an attempt to incorporate and develop the best elements of both the liberal and Indigenous peacebuilding models, scholars have suggested the need to hybridize and make them mutually reinforcing (Mac Ginty, 2011, 2014; Mitchell & Richmond, 2011; Donais, 2012). PACS emancipatory scholarship is foremost driven by the concepts of local ownership and

agency; in particular, researchers believe that the sustainable and inclusive transformation should be consistent with the local environment and supported by individuals and agencies within local communities (Donais, 2012, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2014; Richmond, 2011b; Shinoda, 2015; Byrne & Thiessen, 2019; Thiessen, 2011).

Despite the need to transform local oppressive practices and institutions, no single design or strategy can be successfully applied everywhere in the world. The "one size fits all" model of liberal peace or, as Mac Ginty (2011) refers to it, the "IKEA model" (p. 39), has demonstrated the need for the diversification of transformative strategies. Thus, in identifying specific designs for hybrid peace models, Cooper, Turner, and Pugh (2011) advocate for examining various economic and political forms and negotiating "a paradigm that encompasses alternative notions of life" (p. 2006). Mac Ginty (2011) believes that peacebuilders need to find "the 'right' balance of freedoms … across cultures" (p. 27), and Richmond (2010a) calls for "open[ing] up to the cultural, customary dynamics of the local environment" (p. 31). Moreover, conceptualizations of civil society must also be placed in a context (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 90). Finally, Paffenholz (2015) argues that emancipatory peacebuilding must end the bifurcation of the local and international and cultivate more thorough definitions of local and international actors.

Some critics of emancipatory PACS research have argued that hybrid forms "reproduc[e] the liberal peace's logic" (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015, p. 49), others suggested that liberal peace theory already has a potential to adapt to local conditions (Paris, 2010). In response, emancipatory PACS researchers demonstrate that liberal strategies have exhausted themselves (De Coning, 2016, 2018) and the localization of peacebuilding from a top-down perspective has not increased local ownership (Thiessen, 2011). They identify the need of "strengthening the

resilience of local institutions and … investing in social cohesion" to sustain locally-driven adaptive transformation (De Coning, 2018, p. 304).

Further, emancipatory PACS scholarship is not antagonistic to democracy (Babbitt, 2009), however, democracy is understood as a scale rather than a definite end with democratic norms being powerful only if externalized by the actors (Kinsella & Rousseau, 2009). Whereas transforming institutions may promote the creation of new norms, they require time and a commitment from the population to become a part of the local culture. This commitment can be only guaranteed if locals have participated in designing those norms and institutions and accepted their authority. Although cultures are impossible to transform externally, they are dynamic in nature and, thus, can gradually change to reduce underlying sources of conflict and structural violence (Ryan, 2009). As critical and emancipatory PACS scholarship provides theoretical foundations for empowering local actors to envision and create more just and peaceful societies, it can also be instrumental to designing and increasing the role of local civil society in the governing process.

State – civil society relations

Civil society definitions have emphasized the different functions of civil society (Edwards, 2014) and amplified the distinct approaches to its role in the public sphere and in relations with the state. Understanding civil society as a third sector, both different and independent from the state and private sectors, highlights people's power of self-governance (Putnam, 1995). Normative approaches see the main value of civil society in reinforcing democracy so that civil society is a product of a society's democratic evolution (Shestopal et al.,

2012). Civil society as a driving force to challenge oppressive regimes highlights its transformative potential (Spurk, 2010; Van Tuijl, 2016).

Democratization theories have predominantly focused on the transformative potential of civil society (Huntington, 2009; Sharp, 2010), whereas in PACS research, civil society is theorized as a combination of seven primary functions: protecting citizens, holding government accountable, advocating for citizens' interests, facilitating a dialogue between people and government, providing services, community building, and socializing people with democratic values (Spurk, 2010, pp. 24–25). Traditional and local civil society forms may be more effective in realizing some functions, such as socialization, and liberal NGOs in safeguarding others, such as advocating for human rights (Paffenholz, 2010). This functional approach also highlights the importance of both the advocacy function of civil society and effective cooperation with the state (Paffenholz, 2010; Spurk, 2010). The contention and cooperation between the state and civil society are reflected in the concept of governance, which addresses citizens' participation in the governing process through democratic mechanisms and institutions (Popovski & Cheema, 2010).

Overall, civil society activists face a major dilemma, namely, prioritizing cooperation with the state or resisting it (McCandless, 2016). This dilemma points in two directions for civil society sector development, i.e., confronting the government or participating in governance to advance the conditions of the people. McCandless (2016) refers to this as a challenge between "changes *of* … [versus] changes *in* society" (p. 27). She points out that, although civil society has predominantly used confrontational strategies, developing relations with the state can also help in achieving the long-term goals of the civil society sector.

Civil society in governance. Traditionally, the concept of governance implied the expansion of governing processes beyond the hierarchy of the state and market to include formal

and informal social networks (Jessop, 1998) including, above all else, civil society. Civil society's contribution to governance rests on its "preformed knowledge of democracy and civil society" (Vorbrugg, 2015, p. 136) and the ability to transmit and negotiate this knowledge with policymakers. Guided by the need for collective accountability over the most vital decisions, this process of governing by state and non-state actors involves the creation or reproduction of norms (Bevir, 2012) and collective action (Peters, 2011) both by the state and civil society institutions (Popovski & Cheema, 2010; Schirch, 2016).

Civil society plays an important role in governance by "bridging divides, connecting local voices with the policy realm, and creating significant social change" (Cortright et al., 2016, p. 231). According to Edwards (2014), civil society affects governance in three broad spheres. On the economic level, it provides services and reinforces the norms and institutions of the market economy. By creating social capital, civil society also nurtures and reproduces the norms of responsible citizenship. The political functions of civil society provide it with the responsibility for good governance and holding a state accountable to its citizens (Edwards, 2014). Civil society also plays a vital role in sharing information and spreading norms and values (Levasseur & Frankel, 2016) and translating grassroots knowledge to the elite (Schirch, 2016).

In democratic states, civil society aims to build equal partnerships with the state and business sectors to develop better solutions to social problems through voluntary action. The researchers of state – civil society relations in the established democratic systems conclude that civil society participation in governance requires both cooperation as well as critically assessing its relations with the state to develop mechanisms of accountability (Levasseur, 2018a; Levasseur, 2018b; MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014; Phillips & Levasseur, 2004). Provided that civil society has a comparable influence, cooperation with the state opens up many possibilities.

First, state support to nonprofits can guarantee the sustainability of their projects (Phillips, Laforest, & Graham, 2010). Civil society can also increase its policy capacity through such cooperation (Levasseur, 2014) and include marginalized communities into their advocacy work (DeSantis, 2010, 2013). Further, partnerships between state and civil society enable both service providers and advocacy civil society organizations access to policymaking based on their specific expertise (Mosley, 2012).

For governments, cooperation with civil society can also be beneficial. Civil society activists often join public service and vice versa, ensuring the exchange of opinions and increasing the role of civil society in governance (Lewis, 2008). Informed by the public, civic activists supply the state with innovative ideas that improve the governing process (Phillips & Levasseur, 2004). Nevertheless, even democratic governments have power to control CSOs, especially through funding (Thériault, 2012). Equal partnership with the government is, thus, always a challenge that could only be overcome both by effective cooperation within the civil society sector, including self-regulation mechanisms, and the willingness of the state to transform unequal relations (Phillips, 2012) and to foster co-governance (Levasseur & Frankel, 2016).

In authoritarian political regimes, the state and civil society are often rivals. Civil Society Watch has been constantly concerned about the obstruction of civil society activities all over the world, including arrests and detentions, restriction of activities, censorship, and direct attacks on individual activists (Tiwana, 2010). These concerns make cooperating with the state highly challenging.

While confirming the need to include civil society in governance, scholars have disagreed about the role of agency in this process (Peters, 2011). As argued by Paris (2010), "no society

has a single, unambiguous set of governance structures … that can be automatically activated" (p. 359); therefore, these structures have to be created based on effective designs. By contrast, some scholars advocated for the inclusion of cross-cultural perspectives in governing (Watkins et al., 2004) and suggested that both structures and individual agency are essential in the governing process (Peters, 2011). These debates motivated the re-evaluation of governance beyond established democracies.

Imagining governance outside the limits of formal state institutions led to the development of the concept of good governance as a means of withstanding authoritarian political regimes and representing the population (Mkandawire, 2007). The concept of good governance is characterized by public participation in decision-making, as well as by the presence of institutions that serve the public good (Schirch, 2016). Among others, good governance implied promoting partnerships between the state and non-state actors to provide social services to the general public. However, the governments in countries that have been recipients of international aid have mostly tolerated NGOs due to external pressure (Bano, 2019).

Despite this attempt to re-imagine governance that emerged in the African academic community, it was soon appropriated into the liberal discourse and used as a policy tool (Kluczewska, 2019). Good government has become a normative concept widely used by the development aid agencies as a list of requirements for donor support (Van Doeveren, 2011). As a result, the concept suffers from similar deficiencies as the concept of liberal democracy and measures success in indicators, introduced by international donors. Support to civil society through this framework has been insufficient in developing transparent mechanisms of local governance and in counterbalancing local elites. At best, these liberal civil societies have been weak institutions unable to play an effective governance role. Frequently, civil society has been

co-opted and left with a few limited service-provision functions (Çuhadar & Kotelis, 2010; Kew & Obi, 2010).

Theorizing governance in Russia. Ljubownikow and Crotty (2017) note that, "traditional approaches to civil society assume a political context that is supportive of both civil society activity and public participation" (p. 940). These approaches are difficult to apply to the context of Russia so that it is not surprising that Russian state – civil society relations have been researched mostly in relation to protest activity and political opposition. In particular, researchers have investigated the impact of the 2011-2012 anti-regime protests (Gabowitsch, 2016; Gel'man, 2014, 2015; Gill, 2012; Koesel & Bunce, 2012; Ross, 2015), the specific forms of protest (Beumers, 2018; Brooks Platt, 2018; Yatsyk, 2018), the role of social media in popular mobilization (White & Mcallister, 2014), the cases of spontaneous local mobilization in different Russian regions (Evans, 2014, 2016), and pro-government mobilization (Hemment, 2012).

Above all else, these studies attempt to address to what end government-imposed regulations have shaped Russia's civil society sector. Henderson (2011) argues that the government-established forums had a positive short-term effect, however, in the long run, civil society has been re-shaped according to government priorities. Similarly, Richter (2009) believes that the model of Public Chamber legitimizes the regime. Although it provides the space for cooperation, it is heavily dominated by the state (Stuvøy, 2014). Conversely, Robertson (2009, 2011) believes that although consultative bodies (like the Public Chamber) and state-initiated organizations (e.g., *Nashi, Yunarmia*) in "hybrid regimes" manage protest activity, they create venues for civil society to mobilize and potentially counter the political establishment. Gabowitsch (2016, 2018) asserts that the appearance of the new movements (including pro-

government movements) opens up new space for re-negotiating state – civil society relations in Russia.

The dominant focus on the co-optation of the civil society sphere is reflective of only one side of Russia's state – civil society relations. Analyzing the work of the Public Monitoring Commissions, Owen (2015) confronts the idea that Russians are passive recipients of government-sponsored civil society initiatives. She argues that consent and opposition co-exist and combined have a more significant and nuanced impact on the social sphere than the more radical forms of protest. Therefore, "simple dichotomies between state/society, co-optation/autonomy, repression/protest, etc. are far from clear-cut in today's Russia," and contention and compliance need to be analyzed in more detail (Cheskin & March, 2015, p. 270).

Although most of the literature on Russian civil society focuses on protest activity, some authors have also acknowledged other local forms of civil society (Chebankova, 2015; Silvan, 2015), including service providers or the so-called socially oriented NGOs (Bindman, 2015; Tarasenko, 2018). These nonprofit organizations engage in providing essential services rather than challenging the regime (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017, p. 941). Despite structural limitations, socially oriented organizations are also able to impact governance in Russia's regions (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017). According to Tarasenko (2018), service providers were recently deregulated and developed working mechanisms to "transmit social claims to the political agenda" (p. 294). Bindman (2015) also asserts that the state often relies on the expertise of socially oriented NGOs in improving social policies. For instance, socially oriented NGOs served as partners in developing Russia's new child and family policy (Bindman et al., 2018).

Finally, comparative research has highlighted the different roles of regional civil societies in the governing process. Specifically, researchers have analyzed the differences between the

national and regional political systems (Gel'man & Lankina, 2008; Gel'man, 2010; Lankina,

Libman, & Obydenkova, 2016) and protest activity in Russian regions (Evans, 2012; Evans,

2014, 2016). They have also reported on differences across Russian regions, arguing that local

governments vary in their acceptance of authoritarian traditions (Gel'man, 2010) and some ally

with the opposing movements to counter federal authorities (Evans, 2016, p. 476). Socially

oriented organizations also participate differently in policy development depending on their

relations with the regional elites (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017; Johnson & Saarinen, 2011).

Tatarstan has been researched both as a unique case study of regional authoritarianism

(Mikhailov, 2010) and as a model for civil society participation in formulating and delivering

ethnic policies within Russia's regions (Faller, 2011; Nizamova, 2016; Sergeev, 2008;

Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016; Yusupova, 2016).

Local participation in civil society

There is little debate on the value of popular participation in political transformation and

governance. In democratization and liberal peacebuilding theories, participation is deemed

necessary to guarantee the legitimacy of freely elected democratic governments (Mac Ginty,

2012). Considering that many cases of citizen mobilization have led to democratic outcomes

(Nepstad, 2013), civic mobilization has the potential to enhance democratic institutions (Coelho

& Von Lieres, 2010). In the development discourse, civic engagement is also seen as a pre-

condition for accountable governance (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012), which in turn is a requirement

for donor support.

Some authors are, however, sceptical about the direct influence of broader civic

participation on democratizing political institutions (Elstub, 2010) and as a remedy to promote

civil society. They argue that without meaningful political participation the increase in face-to-face interaction does not promote social capital and enhance people's participation (Wollebæk & Selle, 2010). Further, popular participation may reinforce existing inequalities and power structures (Lee, McQuarrie, & Walker, 2015). Finally, the conceptualization of participation in liberal discourse subjectifies local populations (Mac Ginty, 2012). Consequently, participation has to be critically studied in relation to its specific environment. In this process, the agency of the local population has to be considered (Mac Ginty, 2014; Pugh, 2011; Richmond, 2011b).

Local participation in liberal models. The enhancement of local participation has been attempted within the liberal peace framework largely for practical reasons as an exit strategy (Shinoda, 2015). In the early years of UN peacebuilding, local populations were mainly perceived as recipients of peace initiatives who had to complete their homework of running elections, liberalizing the economy, etc. The concept of ownership in liberal peacebuilding rested on the assumption that locals would internalize liberal democratic values (Donais, 2012), as it had presumably happened in Eastern Europe. In that sense, the locals could own only the results of peacebuilding, not the vision or the process of creating it. Ideally, while enforced by outsiders, liberal values were to be entirely embraced by locals. This model stipulated that only the successful construction of domestic democratic institutions would guarantee that locals could be trusted with peace ownership in the future (Shinoda, 2015).

Locally based NGOs have focused on "selling" peace to locals, including the promotion of liberal values (Donais, 2012). The latter has been unhelpful for CSOs in attracting local participation due to their foreign origin. Furthermore, individual-centered understanding of life promoted under the liberal model is in contradiction to many collective understandings of agency (Boudreau, 2009). For example, the attempt to calculate activism based on individualistic values

of personal engagement, similar to Putnam's (1995) assessments of individual activism in the United States, in post-communist countries is still problematic. In post-communist transitions, where it had mostly existed in the form of social movements protesting against authoritarian regimes (Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2013; Nepstad, 2013; Sharp, 2010), local mobilization has been frequently complimented for its democratic results (Evans, 2011; Nepstad, 2013; Pfaff, 1996). Years after initial mobilization, however, Eastern and Central Europe's CSOs are criticized for their weak protest capacity. At the same time, "transactional activism," defined as "lateral ties among civil society groups and vertical ties between these groups and public officials," remains strong (Petrova & Tarrow, 2007, p. 78).

A lack of capacity is also an issue within the liberal ownership model (Donais, 2012; Özerdem & Lee, 2016; Mac Ginty, 2011). Capacity-building priorities are designed by external donors (Shinoda, 2015). On the one hand, new CSOs are sufficiently funded by these donors; on the other hand, capacity building for local communities is defined outside the political realities of post-peace accord settings and are unable to override existing corrupt and politicized environments (Donais, 2012). Emphasizing elite ownership often resulted in corrupt frameworks (Oberschall, 2007), in which the dominance of certain groups helped them to gain easier access to resources (domestic or international), including the control over funding to CSOs.

Another component of local participation that needs revisiting is voluntary non-participation as a form of local compliance or resistance. According to Mac Ginty (2012), liberal peacebuilding has focused on these binaries (compliance vs. resistance) and ignored the web of broader contexts. He argues that the question of local participation is more complex because the avoidance of consistent political engagement can be explained by strategic, temporal or institutional reasons. Hence, each instance of participation or non-participation should be

evaluated according to its impact on the societal level.

The specifics of participation in liberal models are to a great extent reflected in the case of popular participation in Russia. Although both institutions and popular support are important for change (Gill, 2006), researchers have argued that one of the reasons for the failure of democratization in Russia was the lack of consent within Russian society (Evans, 2011) and little support for civil society initiatives (Henderson, 2002; Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013). The local ownership model in post-Soviet democratization processes was aimed at the local elite and liberal CSOs. These new NGOs were encouraged to "sell" democratic transformation successes to donors whose voice was more important than that of the local population. Donors, in theory, recognized the need to empower local communities yet they were driven by the more urgent need to demonstrate breakthrough results in democratizing Russian society (Henderson, 2002).

As a result, after a short period of mobilization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, civic engagement in Russia rapidly declined (Henderson, 2002). Although "mobilization often involves gains and reversals" (Coelho & Von Lieres, 2010, p. 17), the decline in participation was also explained by the donors' focus on certain types of CSO – advocacy groups (Henderson, 2002). Prioritizing human rights NGOs over other forms of civic activism supported the division between the upper and the lower level civic activity in practice (Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013) and enhanced the "current caricature" of it in the academic literature (Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010, p. 171).

The liberal NGOs have become specifically appealing to one segment of the population that is broadly described as the *intelligentsia* (or creative class) – educated middle-class professionals residing primarily in metropolitan areas (Evans, 2011). Liberal Russian CSOs did

not use adequate instruments to stimulate broader participation (Mersiianova, 2009), nor did they try to expand their membership. They deliberately remained elitist and competed against each other for resources, which undermined their sustainability (Henderson, 2002). According to Lederach (2016) competition between formal CSOs is dysfunctional and is complicated by the fact that informal groups who are ineligible for donor support also compete against formal NGOs for legitimacy and local support. Although those "ineligible" organizations often receive more support from the local population in Russia, participation in civil society has been mainly researched in relation to its democratizing function and it has rarely addressed the cases of service providing nonprofits (Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017).

No doubt, state – civil society relations have also impacted participation in CSOs. On the one hand, government support has partially reflected local realities. In post-Soviet countries, more support has traditionally been given to service providers (Salamon et al., 2017) and those values remain strong in contemporary Russia (Chebankova, 2015). On the other hand, the government has supported "a top-down model of civil society" (Bindman, 2015, p. 344). Although the new laws and policies have increased civic engagement, the view of popular participation advanced by Putin's administration was aimed at unity and community-building and favoured participation in loyal or, at least neutral CSOs, while silencing potential disagreements and conflicts (Henderson, 2011). Whereas initially foreign aid had divided civil society, instead of promoting collaboration (Henderson, 2002), the government's preference for loyal organization, like *Nashi* (Hemment, 2012) advanced this division further. The latter component of popular participation has been studied by the literature on protest and opposition discussed above, in which civic participation is addressed in relation to contention, as well as to the use of specific tools (social media) for pro-government popular mobilization (Epileva &

Magun, 2014; White & McAllister, 2014).

In addition, some authors trace participation back to Russian mentality and its historical development (Buxton, 2014; Tsygankov, 2014; Uhlin, 2005) in which "forced voluntarism"[23] had discouraged Russians from participation in civil society initiatives (Henderson, 2002, p. 141). Although the supporters of this argument have successfully identified local forms of engagement, their acknowledgement of a specific Russian mentality does not offer bright prospects for advancing people's participation in formal CSOs. Moreover, a common belief among Russian intellectuals was that the "Soviet man" draws the country back into authoritarianism and denies the presence of individual agency (Sharadutdinova, 2019). Finally, there is an emerging body of literature that studies participation trends beyond political protests as voluntary work outside formal associations (Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010) and apolitical movements (Cheskin & March, 2015; Epileva & Magun, 2014; Patrusheva, 2013).

Agency and local ownership. Although local ownership has been integrated into the (neo)liberal discourse, it has failed to create bottom-up peacebuilding projects (Chandler, 2017; Thiessen, 2011). Paffenholz (2014) argues that the integration of local ownership into peacebuilding practice has been an "ambivalent encounter" over the past twenty years (p. 25). On the one hand, international support provided exceptional opportunities for local civil society organizations to expand their work; on the other hand, local ownership continues to be donor-driven and does not stimulate local capacity.

Hence, emancipatory peace scholarship investigates local ownership as a foundation for sustainable transformation and governance (Donais, 2012, 2015; Shinoda, 2015; Thiessen, 2014). Donais (2012) defines local ownership as "the degree of control that domestic actors

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[23] Forced voluntarism refers to practices, like *subbotnik* (volunteer Saturday) in the Soviet Union, which initially were volunteer but gradually became compulsory.

wield over domestic political processes" (p. 1). Most importantly, this process of local

institution-building and peacebuilding presumes that people define the phenomena they

encounter in life. The way people understand the world around them impacts how they live in it,

including how they design and sustain governance structures, such as civil society. Freire (2000)

has famously called for "conscientization," referring to the process of naming the world and

oneself within it. Participation in defining local governing structures, their mandate and

limitations, is key to the future development of these institutions and their relations with the

grassroots population. The liberal peace model has been accurate in suggesting that

"conscientization" of local people's agency is central to developing a capacity for local

ownership. However, locals beyond the elite group have rarely participated in "authoring" peace

(Donais, 2012). Instead, ownership of the peace process has been handed down without ensuring

local capacity and local people's willingness to continue peaceful transformation (Özerdem &

Lee, 2016; Mac Ginty, 2011).

Participation in and support of governance institutions, including civil society, are

important in the initial phases of transformation, yet they have to maintain legitimacy among the

local population in later stages as well. Civil society can either represent societal ownership of

transformation and guarantee popular participation in political transformation or remain elitist,

serving the needs of the internal or external donors. Local ownership in the critical and

emancipatory model presumes wider participation as the elites may naturally resist change and if

given absolute power to shape a governance system, they would shape it for their own benefit

(Donais, 2012). Nevertheless, local groups also have diverse and, at times, competing interests.

Although it may be hard (or even impossible) to give equal voice to everyone (Donais, 2012),

reaching consensus could become possible through "building relationships among stakeholders,

empowering diverse stakeholders" (Reimer et al., 2015, p. 60).

An increase in civil society participation indicates support for its local forms. At the same time, viable forms of local governance may perpetuate structural violence or hidden and invisible violence, which according to Galtung (1969, 1990) is sustained by oppressive social structures and institutions, preventing people (in particular, certain groups of people) from achieving their full potential. Idealizing local practices often ignores their oppressive contexts; in particular, oversimplification of local ownership can clear the way for authoritarian regimes to thrive. The most obvious limitation is the exclusion of certain groups from authoring peace (Pugh, 2011) or the underrepresentation of certain populations in civil society initiatives.

CSOs cannot gain public support if their legitimacy is not based on local agency, which makes civil society representative of the population and accountable to it. Defined as the capacity of individuals to make deliberate choices despite structural limitations (Richmond, 2011b), their agency is necessary for political transformation and governance. Although human agencies are contested, they can resist challenges imposed on them by social structures (Boudreau, 2009). The liberal agency discourse does not engage with the lived experiences of people, shaping agency in compliance with liberal institutions (Richmond, 2011b). Repressive states also enforce the compliance of civil society and could only be challenged by the agency of the local population, or as Richmond (2011b) puts it, "where compliance is sought, resistance often emerges" (p. 426). Thus, PACS scholars have argued for local people's everyday agency as means of challenging both the enforced liberal peacebuilding models and repressive local regimes (Donais, 2012; Mac Ginty, 2014; Mitchell & Richmond, 2011; Richmond, 2011b).

In post-communist contexts, the people's agency has been mostly explored in relation to mobilizing social movements against dictatorships (Coelho & Von Lieres, 2010; Sharp, 2010).

This approach has shown little effect in providing the population's continuous participation in governance. In contrast, people's everyday agency is "exercised on a continual basis" (Donais, 2012, pp. 36-37) and provides the space for negotiations through an equitable process of connecting external and local knowledge (Mitchell & Richmond, 2011). Unlike large social movements, people's everyday agency is embedded in everyday seemingly casual activities, which together with institutions, can become an effective tool in political transformation and peacebuilding (Bleiker, 2011; Richmond, 2011a; Richmond; 2010a). Contradictions with everyday agency lead to the "alienation of peace" and people's resistance (Richmond & Mitchell, 2011, p. 5). Additionally, this type of agency has the potential to engage marginalized groups (Taylor-Gooby, 2012), as well as children and youth who, according to Elise Boulding (2000), are often alienated from their agency. In the Russian context, specifically, the denial of youth's agency has been observed during the 2011-2012 political protests (Nechai & Goncharov, 2017), which, unlike the 1991 protests, were driven mostly by young people (Gel'man, 2018).

At the same time, there is neither homogeneous agency within a group nor equal access to exercising that agency. Human agencies embedded in a specific context, can perpetuate it (Boudreau, 2009), and recreate and normalize oppressive structures (Jackson, 2009, p. 175). Human cognition can also create obstacles to rational behavior (Byrne & Senehi, 2009), appealing to group loyalties rather than to rationality (d'Estree, 2009). These concerns rightfully apply to local ownership in the Russian context, where the local population often supports undemocratic regimes (Rose et al., 2011) and chooses to engage in CSOs that are described as undemocratic (Hemment, 2012; Robertson, 2009). Thus, the promotion of civil society participation encounters a dilemma of whether to support all forms of local participation or restrict certain types of participation. Oppressive local institutions need to be transformed, albeit

in a manner that is locally feasible (d'Estree, 2009). Other practices could be sustained, as an illustration, a widespread practice as complaint-making can be regarded as a viable form of civic participation in Russia (Henry, 2012). Ultimately, both universal values and the local context have to be critically reassessed. Equally, civil society activists need to "searc[h for] coexistence between alternative lifestyles" (Chebankova, 2015, p. 245).

Civil society and change

Whether serving as a driving force for democratic transformation or as a tool for mobilizing local engagement in governance, civil society can act as a potential agent of change. The strength of a civil society is in its ability to challenge the state while not being a formal part of it and to envision locally viable innovative models of transformation (Lederach, 2016). The transformative potential of civil society actors has been theorized in middle-range leadership (Lederach, 1997) and in a web model of peacebuilding (Lederach, 2010). According to Paffenholz (2014), the middle-range approach has become a dominating paradigm to challenge the liberal peace narrative and "an almost unquestioned theory of change in civil society peacebuilding" (p. 11). In practice, both the international actors and the local context can be equally important in formulating a transformative peace strategy (Paffenholz, 2014). The middle-range and web approaches explore the power of civil society beyond coercive models of power and are based on its relational power to connect stakeholders across all societal sectors (Lederach, 1997, 2010).

Civil society and power. Political power is often understood as the ability to control (or considerably impact) the actions of others (Van Tuijl, 2016). In this definition, power is manipulative in nature, although not necessarily coercive. As Galtung (1996) notes, "[P]ower

moves actors by persuading them what is right or wrong" (p. 2). The political power of oppressive regimes is based on authority, human resources, knowledge and skills, "intangible factors" (e.g., ideology), material resources, and sanctions (Sharp, 2010, pp. 18–19).

Conversely, opposition to an oppressive regime diminishes its power. The researchers of social movements and nonviolent social change believe that civil society derives its power from the people's power to organize themselves for social action and lead the movement nonviolently (Atack, 2012; Engler & Engler, 2014; Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2013; Nepstad, 2013; Sharp, 2010). Sharp's (2010) guidelines for nonviolent transformation of authoritarian regimes suggest that the sources of power may lie in the agency of people and their ability to cooperate in order to advocate for their interests, even against the overwhelming coercive power of tyrannies. In recent practice, there has been a "rise of many micro powers[,]" which demonstrates that power becomes more accessible to non-coercive forces (Van Tuijl, 2016, p. 7).

The sources of power are diverse. Kenneth Boulding (1990) has famously identified three main types of power: the stick, the carrot, and the hug. The first is openly coercive; the second is a soft manipulation of people; the last represents the power of love. Chinn (2013) distinguishes between "power over" and "power with." Finally, "power within," has become central to the concept of empowerment owing, in particular, to Paulo Freire (2000); it describes the potential of people to act if they are aware of their own power (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2007). Additionally, the concept of everyday agency advocates for "a fundamental rethinking of the meaning and location of power" (Mac Ginty, 2011, p. 45). It suggests that hidden forms of agency have the power to challenge power asymmetry and foster social change (Babbitt, 2009; Richmond, 2011b).

Civil society benefits from both "power with" and "power within," capitalizing on

relations with other sectors, and cultivating the support of the local population. Beyond

spontaneous popular mobilization, civil society sustains its power through supporting

connectivity and enhancing relations. Lederach (1997, 2010) argues that the power of the

middle-range leaders derives from their personal and professional achievements rather than

coercive tools, and provides them with leverage to connect across various sectors of society. This

connectivity fosters "change that would not be possible otherwise" (Bartoli, 2009, p. 407). In

addition to other sectors, the power of civil society organizations is defined by their ability to

cooperate with states. Civil society walks a fine line to "challenge and transform power

relations" (Van Tuijl, 2016, p. 2). It seeks to transform unjust state practices and, at the same

time, "to maneuver within existing power structures" (McCandless, 2016, p. 25).

   As noted above, the concept of power is connected to the notion of empowerment. As a

theoretical model, the concept of empowerment aims to explore the process of increasing the

autonomy of individuals and communities. Empowerment is also value-driven both in its goals

and instruments of change (Zimmerman, 2000). Knowledge is essential to empowering

communities (Freire, 2000). Knowledge and its effective use in envisioning transformation also

provide power and legitimacy to CSOs (Lederach, 2016). This information includes technical

knowledge, knowledge of local communities, and an ability to see the bigger picture on national

and international levels (Van Tuijl, 2016).

   The concept of empowerment has been studied in many disciplines, in particular, gender

studies (Flaherty, 2012), due to the overarching meaning of this concept. In peacebuilding,

empowerment has been central to defining both the method and the normative value of

transformation. Lederach (1997) has argued that this concept "encompasses, generates, and

sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and strategies needed to transform conflict

toward more sustainable, peaceful relations" (p. 22). Deriving its legitimacy from public support, civil society plays an important role in empowering communities (Cortright et al., 2016).

Formally "enshrined" in peace accords (Fidzduff & Gormley, 2000, p. 65), civil society empowerment has become a requirement for peacebuilding (Andrieu, 2010) yet often it remained fruitless in liberal peace models, setting unattainable standards for NGOs to be "empowered" (Kang, 2017). In the cases of post-communist transitions, empowerment was also seen as a tool to re-locate the source of power from states to civic activists (Baker, 2002). The attempt to empower liberal NGOs in Russia did not produce change on the societal level, nor significantly affected enough individuals to trigger transformation within communities. In contrast, activists in Russia have explored local empowerment models in their practice that would provide tools and help citizens to participate in civic action (Ermoshina, 2014).

Whereas empowerment has been important to ensure effective participation, its effectiveness under the liberal framework has been compromised. Civil society construction within the liberal peace model has largely failed due to "the unresolved issue of power" whenever power structures remain unchallenged (Ottaway, 2003, p. 248 cited in Kjellman & Harpviken, 2010, p. 36). Limitations on the power of civil society include a lack of participation by, and accountability to stakeholders, and the exclusion of certain actors (Bartoli, 2009).

Middle-range leadership in social change. Social change requires creativity in finding new solutions to old problems (Lederach, 2016). To be effective, change needs to happen on several levels (Dayton & Kriesberg, 2009, p. 11) and include both short-term solutions and foundations for long-term sustainable social change. Therefore, theorists who focus on the root causes of conflict, for example in the social cubism analytical framework (Byrne & Nadan, 2011), argue that change is possible through addressing six interrelated causes. Scholars have

also asserted that transformation is possible through individual (Jantzi & Jantzi, 2009) and structural change (Özerdem & Lee, 2016). On the individual level, change can be facilitated through such forms as reconciliation and storytelling (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014; Reimer et al., 2015; Rosoux, 2009; Senehi, 2015), however, to transform societal relations, the number of the "transformed" individuals needs to reach a critical mass (Jantzi & Jantzi, 2009). On the societal level, a personal transformation may not be enough, as "societies are … unlikely to change their patterns of power and privilege unless forced to do so" (De Coning, 2018, p. 315). At the same time, social systems can evolve, adapt, and self-organize, although this process is complex and requires efforts on multiple levels (Brusset, Coning, & Hughes, 2016; De Coning, 2016, 2018). The conflict transformation approach, in particular, seeks to address structural problems by generating social change (Özerdem & Lee, 2016).

Civil society is one of the key actors that contribute to social change. Given that the externally developed models of change often encounter challenges, local civil society forms are strategically placed to inductively approach models of change. They also have an opportunity to gain local knowledge from the local communities, to support and prevent them from sliding into violence (De Coning, 2018). Here, change becomes possible by generating "critical yeast" (Lederach, 2010) — a combination of the right people placed strategically on the "web of peace" (Lederach, 2010, 2016).

In the concept of middle-range leadership civil society is understood through its relations with other actors (Amaladas & Byrne, 2017). Middle-range leaders are also empowered by the grassroots knowledge (Lederach, 1997). Originally, Lederach (1997) argued that the leadership on the middle level is an effective way to connect ordinary people with the decision-making level. In this model, the well-recognized government elite or leaders of the opposition represent

the top-level leadership, whereas grassroots leaders represent local communities on a daily basis. They understand and experience the same problems as the rest of the population. Middle-range leaders are in a strategic position to connect the bottom and the top levels. They are not as fixed in their positions as elites who fear losing face, yet they have enough privilege to remain above the everyday survival concerns of the grassroots. This level of leadership includes highly respected individuals and also groups and networks, such as universities, churches, NGOs, and other groups that may be broadly defined as civil society groups and have the ability to connect different actors both vertically and horizontally.

According to Lederach (1997), there are certain challenges to including the middle-range leadership in political transformation and peacebuilding, as the members of this group do not remain neutral and represent the most diverse groups of people. Further, a lack of coercive power requires the middle-range leadership to act with creativity, trust, and respect. The middle-range finds itself in the net of power relations and can use its influence to enforce different positions. Stronger connections with the elite may reinforce the top-level's pressure to focus on a particular group's agenda. Finally, all three leadership levels, as well as the relationship between them, are equally important. To be effective, the middle-range level has to develop meaningful communication strategies and relationships with other levels.

The middle-range leadership approach has been criticized for being narrowly interpreted by the NGOs on the ground as a panacea against all ills of liberal peacebuilding. Paffenholz (2014) asserts that practitioners followed the middle-range approach religiously, ignoring the later development of Lederach's (2010) theory, in particular, his web of peace model. She suggests that peacebuilding has passed the period of being exclusively outsider-driven and now requires a more nuanced approach to the role of the middle-range leadership.

In the web model of peacebuilding, Lederach (2010) has transformed and expanded his three-level framework. He argues that relationships are central to all social interactions and restoring them is key to building sustainable peace. The metaphor of a spider web is used to highlight the importance of every linkage and the power of networking. In this model, civil society continues to play a significant role in creating horizontal and vertical connections. Civil society is a complex mechanism that creates space for transformation. On the one hand, "you have to be close enough to the ground to hear the roots grow" (Lederach, 2016, p. xxi). On the other hand, civil society has the voice to transmit this sound across the web. In other words, all "levels of society need each other in very concrete and meaningful ways" (Lederach, 2016, p. xviii).

Despite its potential, civil society has limitations in peacebuilding and political transformation. Paffenholz (2010) argues that there are no "success criteria and transparent methodologies" to assess the effectiveness of civil society (p. 59). As scholars and practitioners move away from the liberal peace framework, they face challenges in designing new accountability approaches and evaluation of CSOs. Therefore, local civil societies need to take the lead in designing better accountability frameworks to the communities they are representing (Van Tuijl, 2016). These frameworks have to be defined by stakeholders (Gurkaynak, Dayton, & Paffenholz, 2009) on a case-by-case basis and be context-specific (Ryan, 2009). Effective frameworks need to include alternatives to donor funding, possibly through cooperation with the private sector (MacDonald, 2013; Smith, 2010). Likewise, accountability mechanisms are as important as funding strategies (Paffenholz, 2014) and currently continue to be prescribed by donors (Zelizer, 2013).

As argued above, CSOs can be both the agents and products of social change. Their effectiveness is defined by many factors, including the state, the diversity of civil society, and external pressures (Paffenholz et al., 2010, p. 405). In attempting transformation, one needs to be realistic about the rapidness of change (Bartoli, 2009) and approach transformation as an ongoing process that cannot develop in a linear manner (De Coning, 2018). Rather, it is a spiral in which change continuously needs to be "nourished" (Lederach, 2003). Every strategy, no matter how successful initially, has to be regularly re-assessed. Finally, the challenge is not to avoid potential conflicts but to build resilience and justice and adjust to change (De Coning, 2018).

Conclusion

The theoretical framework discussed in this chapter provides a foundation to analyze the role of Tatarstan's civil society in political transformation and governance. The concept of civil society is explored in the liberal and emancipatory models to demonstrate conceptually different approaches to defining civil society in non-Western contexts. The theoretical underpinnings of democratization in post-communist transitions are also considered. The section on the state – civil society relations identifies various approaches to understanding the role of civil society in governance and provides an overview of the literature on state – civil society relations in Russia. Further, local ownership and agency are analyzed in contrast to popular mobilization theories in liberal models to address the specifics of popular engagement. Finally, the potential of civil society in transformation is summarized through the lens of power and middle-range leadership theories. The theoretical background in this chapter frames the discussion in the empirical chapters. The next chapter discusses the research methodology that was utilized in this study.

Chapter 4

Methodology: 35 stories, 35 venues, 35 taxi rides

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methods and methodology implemented in this research, and to define the limitations of the research design. As Mills (2014) puts it, the methodology guides the researcher through the study and defines how she positions herself in relation to the study participants. The methodology reflects the desired research outcome, determines the decisions made about the study, and informs the selections of specific methods to explore the research question.

The goal of this research was to understand the role of civil society in governance and within the broader political transformation process in Tatarstan (Russia) by interviewing civil society activists and giving voice to local experiences in Russia's civil society research. Guided by this goal, I adopted a grounded theory methodology. Similar to other qualitative methodologies, it guarantees the depth, rather than the breadth of the research (Brounéus, 2011), allows one to understand phenomena inductively (Cooper & Finley, 2014), and can be effectively used in diverse cultural environments (Charmaz, 2014).

The focus on civil society activists was deliberate and driven by the "middle-range leadership" idea (Lederach, 1997) and the "web approach" (Lederach, 2010). The purpose of the study was to understand Tatarstan's civil society in its relations with the grassroots and policy levels, and to locate this knowledge within CSOs and groups. This study was guided by PACS theoretical principles and theories. PACS civil society research provides practical tools for empowering local actors in envisioning and creating more just and peaceful communities, which

could be considered by Russian CSOs in re-imagining their role in political transformation and governance.

The interest in local experiences was also guided by the need to identify deficiencies and advantages within the current civil society framework. Local knowledge compels a society to develop a vision and long-term commitment (Lederach, 2010) and it is essential to successful programming (Wisler, 2013). Consequently, I hoped that uncovering local knowledge would also offer potential solutions to prevailing challenges. In addition, identifying locally based understandings of civil society and the issues related to state – civil society relations could be further applied in designing civil society strategies and advocacy models.

I used semi-structured open-ended interviews with civil society activists. This research was designed as an in-depth exploratory case study of civil society in Tatarstan. The study focused on the local experiences of civil society activists and did not provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of other Russian settings, although the research participants occasionally chose to juxtapose their organizations with CSOs outside of Tatarstan.

This chapter discusses: (1) grounded theory methodology and its application to this research; (2) the sampling method; (3) the description of the research participants; (4) issues related to participants' confidentiality; (5) my own positionality as researcher; (6) the research question and research instrument; (7) data collection and data analysis; (8) research validity; (9) research limitations; and (10) research dissemination.

The following sections aim to explain how philosophical underpinnings of the selected methodology have impacted the research design, process, and outcome. They also connect all stages of the research, beginning with the preliminary research (the review of the relevant

literature, public opinion polls, and documents) to data collection, analysis, and research findings

dissemination, and identify challenges and solutions at each stage.

Grounded theory

According to Cooper and Finley (2014) grounded theory makes it possible for a theory to

emerge inductively from participants' experiences and stories, which reflects the theoretical

foundations of PACS research aimed to "loo[k] beyond the constraints of orthodox theory and

methodology" (Richmond, 2010b) and to improve the current situation (Wallensteen, 2011).

Traditionally, grounded theorists have argued that a researcher could be positioned outside of the

data collected and avoid influencing the research results. In contrast, constructivist grounded

theorists argue that the data is co-constructed by the participants and the researcher

(Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills, & Usher, 2013). This latter approach suggests that a grounded

theory emerges from the core categories developed by the researcher. Although these core

categories emanate from the stories of the participants, the researchers have to be aware of the

impact they have on data collection, analysis, and interpretation and to be explicit about it (Mills,

2014). Reflexivity allows grounded theorists to minimize their impact during the stages of data

collection and analysis, and to produce unbiased findings, to the extent possible. Bearing in mind

these guidelines, I recorded the research activities in the field notes to trace my decision-making

process during the data collection and analytical stages, and used other methods to comply with

grounded theory. These specific methods are further addressed in the sections on data collection

and analysis.

In addition, grounded theory embeds methods in a particular context and location

(Charmaz, 2014; Thiessen & Byrne, 2017). As such, it helped me to understand the conditions in

which Tatarstan's civil society had developed, as well as the knowledge of people living in this environment. Instead of providing participants with the established definitions of civil society, democracy or governance, the study focused on uncovering their experiences in the civil society sector in the Tatarstan region, which then allowed the respondents to suggest their own definitions of these phenomena.

At the same time, Cooper and Finley (2014) contend that the focus of the qualitative interviews should not be on factual accuracy but on reasons for the interviewees to present information in a certain way. Thus, the researchers conducting in-depth interviews should be able to understand and interpret not only true stories from the field but also the meta-data (e.g., deception) (Brounéus, 2011). Further, Charmaz (2014) argues that grounded theory inquiry has to be adapted to the cultural environment and specific research goals. To collect reliable data, the researcher must not only have access to the community but also possess an understanding of what is seen as acceptable during the study.

Two main features influenced the application of the grounded theory in this research. First, I had to adapt to my respondents' understanding of the interview process. Scheduling proved to be almost impossible, requiring the flexibility of a professional gymnast to meet with the participants anywhere and at any time. This seemingly technical detail helped to deconstruct vertical relationships between the researcher and the respondents, encouraging the latter to take ownership of the process. As an illustration, several conversations with the interviewees often evolved from "what do you want to hear, I'll say it" to "I would really want to apply the results of this research in my practice."

Another factor that often requires adaptation is the use of two languages. In this study, the adaptation was necessitated by the empirical experience in the field and the vocabulary used by

the civil society activists. My experience of using two languages during the research process was somewhat similar to the experiences described by Charmaz (2014). The Russian language is less conceptual and systematic than English, and the terms that are widely used to talk about civil society (in fact, the term "civil society") are borrowed from English. Thus, it was essential to uncover the research participants' meanings behind these well-established terms, which produced more nuanced results and helped me to understand the subtexts. The use of the Russian language was practical during the data collection and the concurrent analysis phase. However, during the later stages of my analysis, the precise and analytic nature of English was more appropriate for assigning categories and drafting findings.

Sampling

The research included qualitative face-to-face interviews with 35 participants. I used purposive sampling to identify and select study participants. The choice of purposive sampling was driven by several factors. First, purposive sampling is used for in-depth qualitative research with informants who represent specific cases rather than the population in general (Serra, Psarra, & O'Brien, 2018), and in my case these are civil society activists. Purposive sampling also helps to identify sub-groups within a sample and study the members of these sub-groups (Small, 2009), which allowed me to focus on three main sub-sectors of Tatarstan's civil society. Further, Van Rijnsoever (2017) recommends applying purposive sampling when a researcher can observe data during the study and establish whether theoretical saturation is reached. I continued data collection and preliminary analysis until no new information from the interviews was emerging. In addition, ethical considerations eliminated using snowball sampling as it could expose the identities of the study's interviewees.

Initially, I contacted eight key informants from my professional and personal contacts in Tatarstan's academic and nonprofit communities to identify potential CSOs and groups that might be interested in participating in the study. The study participants belonging to those groups and organizations were then identified through professional websites and social networks. Further, I identified organizations and activists based on the information about civil society in Tatarstan available on public domains. In addition, during their interviews, some research participants mentioned other CSOs and projects in Tatarstan. However, unlike traditional snowball sampling (see, e.g., Cohen & Arieli, 2011), I did not intentionally ask the respondents to locate other potential study participants. Rather, I used the information they provided to expand my search for civil society groups and contacted the potential informants directly without mentioning any referrals to preserve the anonymity of the research participants.

As a result, I contacted 142 potential interviewees, inviting them to participate in the study. The goal was to include participants representing diverse civil society groups working in various areas. The decision to invite participants was based on their civil society experience. In selecting participants, I tried, when possible, to balance the representation of age, gender, ethnicity (Tatar, Russian, and minority groups residing in Tatarstan), and professional identities (political and apolitical civil society groups) who work both in the capital city of Kazan and in other urban and rural areas of Tatarstan. Collecting this demographic data assisted me in describing the research sample, and drawing similarities and differences across the diverse members of the civil society sector.

The sampling process was also a reflexive process in line with grounded theory, which helped me to determine the actual size and multiplicity of Tatarstan's civil society groups. Whereas I strategized the sampling and recruitment processes, continuously reflecting on my

conversations with civil society representatives to reveal the true composition of CSOs in relation to the outlined demographic identifiers. The initial sampling was adjusted accordingly to reflect civil society design and diversify the apolitical groups, and to distinguish between the socially oriented organizations and apolitical independent movements and groups. Grounded theorists refer to this process as theoretical sampling that requires one to alternate the process of sampling, data collection, and analysis (Mills, 2014).

Description of the research participants

In this study, the definition of civil society is intentionally broad to include interviewees who were active in their community beyond the members of voluntary associations. Tatarstan's civil society sector consists of formal CSOs and informal social movements. In the first group, participants were recruited from CSOs' staff or board members. In the second group, participants were active members in independent groups. These groups do not have any formal leadership; so their active status was defined by their regular involvement in offline protests. Despite the number of independent civil society groups in Tatarstan and a high number of online followers, very few members organize and join protests in real life.

I contacted persons who were individually or as a part of an organization engaged in the realization of major civil society functions. According to Spurk (2010), those functions include protecting citizens, holding government accountable, advocating for citizens' interests, facilitating a dialogue between people and the government, providing services, community building, and socializing people with democratic values.

Table 2: Demographic information

Type of organization	
Socially oriented[24]	20
Political agenda[25]	7
Civil activist/no formal organization	8
Age	
under 45	23
over 45	12
Gender	
Male	22
Female	13
Ethnicity	
Russian	16
Tatar	15
A minority group member	4

Table 2 indicates that out of 35 respondents, 20 activists represented socially oriented

organizations, 7 worked at organizations with political or/and a human rights agenda, and 8 were

independent activists. This disproportion reflects the exceeding number of socially oriented

CSOs in comparison to political or independent activists. Although I contacted a comparable

number of representatives in all three civil society sectors, socially oriented activists were also

more eager to accept my invitation to participate in the study. This could possibly be explained

by the fact that the socially oriented civil society activists were less concerned about giving an

interview because they were not involved in any political activity. Several research participants

also pointed out that independent activists had tighter schedules, balancing their activism with

paid jobs.

[24] Socially oriented organization (Russian: *sotsialno-orientirovannia organizatsia,* also *SONKO)* – is a nonprofit that provides social services and is not directly involved in political activity. This term was coined by Putin's administration to identify organizations that do not oppose the regime and are eligible to receive government funding.
[25] Political organization is generic term that unites extra-parliamentary parties and human rights organizations. This is also a term used by the study participants to distinguish CSOs that aim at changing political regime.

During the interviews, the respondents were invited to introduce themselves and their civil society affiliation by describing their CSOs and the projects in which they were involved. The participants who affiliated themselves with extra-parliamentary parties or social movements were classified broadly as activists with a political agenda (or, as most respondents called themselves, they were political activists). This group included staff, volunteers and also activists who participated in the work of political CSOs without any formal designation. In this group, some activists prioritized a human rights agenda, however, the main goal of all organizations and activists in this group was to change the political regime in Russia.

The socially oriented activists introduced themselves as members of *obshchestvennye* (voluntary) organizations. Their objectives included the fulfillment of different civil society functions, except for political advocacy and holding governments accountable; many focused on service-provision. The socially oriented activists did not necessarily call themselves as such yet they highlighted their socially oriented projects.

Whereas political and socially oriented activists are categorized according to whether they pursue political or apolitical agendas, the separate sub-group of independent activists crystallized during data gathering and analysis. Initially, I discovered in the academic literature two civil society clusters that exist in Russia (for example, Buxton, 2014; Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010). However, several research participants described themselves as belonging neither to socially oriented, nor to political CSOs. Instead, they self-identified with various informal groups. The members of these groups were united beyond any political ideology to pursue a common goal. They were committed to socially oriented causes yet they often used tactics common to Tatarstan's political organizations, such as rallies and pickets. The strongest part of their civil society identity was their independence from any formal organization.

Having identified this group during my first interviews, I used recommendations from my key informants, other research participants, and open sources to search for other independent groups and activists.

To protect the identities of the research participants, I refrain from naming the organizations they represent. In particular, naming a limited number of political and independent activists in Tatarstan might identify their organizations and groups. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identities in line with ethics approval. Therefore, in this thesis, I refer to the spheres the study participants represent more broadly. It is also worth noting that the status of some activists changed while I was finishing this thesis, which demonstrates the fluidity of the civil society sector. One independent activist decided to join the political competition, whereas one activist is contemplating leaving a socially oriented organization to work informally for independent groups.

With regards to the interviewees' ages, I initially divided the research participants into two groups, those aged 45 to 80, and those aged 18 to 44. However, my expectation that an older group may express contrasting opinions with the younger group did not materialize. Overall, the research participants' ages varied with the youngest 19 and the oldest 73 years of age.

The sample included 22 men and 13 women. The gender imbalance did not impact the relevance of the conclusions, as the study participants demonstrated no discrepancies in relation to their gender when assessing the role of Tatarstan's civil society. However, the recruitment process revealed the greater involvement of men in political organizations, confirming some of the previous research (e.g., Epileva & Magun, 2014), while the socially oriented and independent groups were more balanced. Although I attempted to include an equal number of men and women, more potential female participants declined my invitation to participate in the study.

They responded that they were busy with work, children, and house chores, which is in line with

the patriarchal distribution of gender roles in modern Russian society (e.g., Etkind, 2018)

Finally, the research sample included representatives of different ethnic groups residing

in Tatarstan and reflected the ethnic composition of the Republic, where Tatars and Russians are

the two largest ethnic groups. Several key minority ethnic groups were also represented. I

interviewed 16 Russians, 15 Tatars, and 4 representatives of ethnic minority groups. I do not

identify these minority groups here to protect participants' anonymity. The research participants

self-identified as belonging to certain ethnic groups. Giving voice to the members of different

ethnic groups fell in line with the selected methodology to represent the diverse Tatarstan

population. It is important to note that this is an exploratory case study of a sample size of 35

respondents and cannot be generalized to the wider society.

Confidentiality

The protection of human subjects was a widespread concern for me during the field

research. Primary ethical considerations in PACS research include the protection of the

participants' identity and minimizing the risks of their participation in the research (Cooper &

Finley, 2014). This research was conducted in a constrained political environment, where sharing

political views could impact the participants' professional careers. To preserve the

confidentiality of my contacts, I did not involve other people in contacting research participants,

nor did I use any formal channels of communication (for example, Public Chamber). Rather, I

approached the activists directly via email. Further communication with the participants about

the project was conducted via encrypted messaging apps: WhatsApp and Telegram. The

participants' self-selection helped to reduce the danger of exposing their names to the public.

Pseudonyms are used in all research-related documentation. The research did not involve any deception or coercion[26].

The introductory letter (Appendix 1) contained my contact information and disclosed the purpose of the study, clearly indicating that the participants did not have to respond to my email without any consequences. Next, I familiarized the participants with the details of the research and asked them to complete a written informed consent form (Appendix 3) prior to the interview. Both the introductory letter and the informed consent form were distributed to the participants in Russian (Appendix 2 and Appendix 4).

The introductory form outlined the purpose of the research, the participants' rights, and the responsibilities of the researcher. The research participants had an opportunity to read the consent form and to ask questions prior to the meeting. During the interviews, the research participants were asked to confirm their consent to participate in the research verbally and to sign the consent form.

The interviews took from thirty to ninety minutes to complete, with an opportunity provided to the respondents to request a follow-up meeting with me. The research participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the interview and from the study at any stage. After the interviews, the interviewees had access to their interview transcripts to exclude any responses that made them feel uncomfortable or to withdraw their participation from the study. One research participant made minor changes to his transcript, another respondent verbally asked to withdraw some of her answers from the transcript during the interview. All revisions were recorded on my digital voice recorder.

[26] REB Protocol #J2017:060 (HS20972). Approved July 25, 2017; extended June 29, 2018; extended July 15, 2019.

The respondents were provided the opportunity to select any name they wished me to use in the thesis or they permitted me to assign them pseudonyms. I made one hand-written copy of the list of pseudonyms and kept it in secure storage in my apartment. I used the selected pseudonyms during the research analysis and later in the data reporting. The participants were notified that all taped recordings would be destroyed after the project ends. With the participants' permission, I audio-recorded the interviews and safely stored the recordings in a secure location. The interview transcripts were transcribed on my password-protected computer and backed up on an external encrypted hard-drive. None of the research-related information was shared or stored online. All research-related files and folders were encrypted.

Research question and research instrument

The main research question refers to the role of civil society in locally based political transformation and governance in Tatarstan. To tackle this question, the study explored the following sub-questions: (1) How do Tatarstan's civil society members understand the role of civil society in the governing process? (2) How do local people participate in civil society organizations? (3) What are the relationships between the civil society sector and the government? (4) What strategies have civil society organizations previously employed and what effect did they have?

To explore the research question, one research instrument consisting of semi-structured interviews with participants was used during this study. The researcher guided the discussion with the following eight open-ended questions:

1. Could you describe yourself and the work you do formally and informally?

2. What are some successes and challenges for your organization/you as a civic activist?

3. Overall, how would you describe Tatarstan's civil society?

4. How did Tatarstan's civil society sector emerge and develop?

5. How do you collaborate with the local population?

6. How would you describe state – Tatarstan's civil society relations?

7. Imagine state – civil society relations. What should they be like?

8. How do you see the future of Tatarstan's civil society?

Some of these questions were used directly during the interviews while other probing questions guided the discussion when the participants diverged from the topic significantly (Appendix 4 in English and Appendix 6 in Russian). The semi-structured interviews allowed me to be flexible in following up with new questions in response to participants' comments and they encouraged the interviewees to provide examples in their responses based on their professional and personal experiences. When a participant struggled to respond to a question, it was also helpful to break it into several parts (for instance, to start with successes and move to challenges later) or to re-arrange the sequence of the questions, depending on the flow of the interview. Changing the sequence of the interview questions may have impacted the data collection, but it was, nonetheless, necessary to encourage the research participants to share information in the order most convenient to them.

Researcher's positionality

Positionality of the researcher is crucial in the grounded theory methodology. Identifying oneself as a member of a particular group and subgroup happens throughout the research process (Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013). I began this study by outlining my belonging to several key sub-groups. First, I had to determine the benefits and disadvantages related to my nationality and

current residency. On the one hand, outsider researchers could be perceived as less biased because they are distanced from the context. On the other hand, qualitative methodologists often argue for the use of insider research (for example, in Indigenous research [Smith, 2012]). Despite having certain preconceptions of the research settings, insider researchers possess important knowledge of the local culture (Charmaz, 2014). Nevertheless, insider researchers need to be reflexive and critical of their own biases to make sure that they do not test their own preconceptions of their community (Smith, 2012). Whereas insider awareness can be balanced against the bias of experience (McCandless, 2016), the reflexive approach can help make the data collection process more inductive (Ackerly & True, 2010). Insider (or outsider) roles are also often not clear-cut (Höglund, 2011).

In this research, I identified myself as an insider-outsider: a Russian (both by nationality and ethnicity), I am affiliated with a foreign (Canadian) institution. In my field notes, I commented that several research participants noted that my affiliation with Canada meant that I was more open-minded. At the same time, in many contexts "people only talk in vague terms with strangers" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1077), and several respondents commented that they were unable to develop a deep level of trust with a foreigner.

I am a woman in her mid-thirties so I was also reflexive about how my age and gender could potentially influence my interview participants' responses. Tatarstan is a patriarchal society so female researchers (especially, younger women) are sometimes perceived as less authoritative than their male peers. Although a few of my male participants chose a patronizing tone with me (as an illustration, one respondent persisted in calling me *stazherka* – a female intern – even after I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student), the majority of the respondents

remained professional and respectful. In fact, I felt that my age and gender reduced some of my respondents' discomfort, making the interview process more informal.

Data collection

The process of data collection started with a review of the academic literature, legislation, public opinion polls, and news reports on Tatarstan's civil society activism that were necessary in terms of conceptualizing the research instrument and prepare for the field research. Later, I conducted in-person semi-structured open-ended interviews with the research participants. The interviews were carried out in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan. The centralized nature of the civil society sector ensured that all of the participants were able to meet with me in Kazan despite the fact that some were originally from and worked in other locations in Tatarstan. The interviews were conducted between September and December 2017.

To minimize potential biases connected to my positionality and to establish equal relations between the interviewees and myself, I invited and met the respondents in the environment and at a time that was most comfortable to them. All of the meetings were held in the locations chosen by the participants. The overwhelming majority of the respondents chose a public space such as a coffee shop, a café, a park, or a mall. One research participant preferred meeting me at my home office, and nine respondents invited me to their office.

In my field notes, I reflected on the choice of meeting the interviewees in a crowded place vis a vis a quiet space like a home office. Although none of the respondents provided any explanation for their choice of meeting location (and I did not ask them to), some mentioned that they were not afraid to publicly discuss their activism. In fact, it may have been an empowering

experience for some, as several of the respondents mentioned that our conversation stimulated their re-conceptualizing of civil society activism.

All interviews were conducted in Russian and were audio recorded. Although the research participants were informed that the interview recording was optional, they all consented to be recorded. Two research participants asked to go off record briefly during the interview, and to honor their request the recorder was switched off until they permitted me to turn it back on.

All of the interviews were transcribed between November 2017 and April 2018. I personally transcribed all of the interviews in the original Russian language to make sure that the meaning was not lost in translation. I also ensured that the interviewee's emotions were identified through the audio (such as changing the tone of voice, laughter, etc.). The latter, for instance, helped me to identify respondents' attitudes to certain policies and politicians when they would not talk about them directly (such as, meticulously pronouncing Putin's full name).

During the data collection phase, I also kept my field notes up-to-date. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note that reflective field notes are useful to record the evolution of the data analysis. I used the field notes to keep records of the interaction dynamics, body language, and my reflections in order to inform the data analysis. The field notes were used to identify themes and to improve the interview process.

Several secondary data sources were also used in this research such as media sources, public opinion polls, and NGO publications. Media sources are helpful in understanding state – civil society relations, learning about updates on legislation and current political debates on the role of civil society, and acquiring up-to-date information about regions. Although media sources provide the most current information about the state of affairs on the level of decision-making, a significant limitation is involved, i.e., their commonly partisan source. Local media sources are

often censored by the government or self-censored by journalists, whereas foreign media coverage is less close to the local reality and involves many challenges, including linguistic (Öberg & Sollenberg, 2011). Therefore, I employed these information sources with caution, studying multiple media outlets to balance the potential biases in media coverage.

In contrast to media sources, NGO publications are more selective in providing data on a specific issue, such as human rights violations. Although these publications may also be partisan they are generally good for covering top-level politics or in providing information on specific cases (Höglund & Öberg, 2011a), and are better used in combination with other sources.

Finally, surveys can be useful to elucidate the bigger picture. Public opinion polls can be used to identify the key trends in civic participation and attitudes toward civil society and good governance. Druckman (2009) contends that surveys are helpful in PACS research in linking micro- and macro-level analyses. At the same time, numbers do not always speak to the accuracy of survey results. Yes-or-no questions limit opportunities to explain the diversity of roles and attitudes (Eck, 2011). Thus, comparing data from surveys with information from interviews can reveal contradictions between the statistics and the reality on the ground (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Analyzing and explaining these contradictions provided a more detailed picture in this research.

Data analysis

I analyzed the data inductively. A grounded theory approach requires the researcher to analyze the data parallel to its collection (Mills, 2014). Therefore, after the collection of the first five interviews, I transcribed and analyzed them and together with an analysis of my field notes I was able to determine further data collection goals. The initial data analysis helped me to

establish whether the data quality and breadth corresponded to the research goals. I proceeded by analyzing subsequent interviews in line with my field observations throughout the research process. In addition, concurrent data collection and analysis allowed me to establish data saturation at the point when the subsequent interviews did not provide any new information.

In inquiries guided by grounded theory, the new data should be continuously compared with the existing data to facilitate coding (Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013). Furthermore, the information gained from one source may complement or contradict data from other sources. The consistency and inconsistency of information provide researchers with valuable knowledge both about the research question and the reliability of the information sources. Gathering information from multiple sources with the use of triangulation increases the chances of producing reliable data (e.g., Cooper & Finley, 2014; Höglund & Öberg, 2011a). Hence, I analyzed the interview transcripts in relation to each other. This allowed me to incorporate similarities and discrepancies in the multiple perspectives of the research participants into the data analysis.

NVivo software was used to facilitate data analysis. This tool can be applied to a wide range of qualitative research designs and is compatible with grounded theory. While the software did not substitute the researcher in identifying themes, it assisted me in structuring the data analysis and improved its accuracy. I started with creating an encrypted offline project in NVivo and adding three folders to the internal sources, namely interviews, secondary sources, and research administration. The interview transcripts were then uploaded to the project. Prior to transferring the interview transcripts, I had listened to and transcribed each interview in its entirety. My field notes were added as memos to the corresponding interview transcripts together with my comments from listening to the audio files. In my Nvivo project, I also created cases to

reflect the demographic information that I had collected in the field to later compare it to my respondents' responses.

The data coding commenced after I transcribed all of the interviews, received feedback from the participants, listened to, and reread the transcripts. The transcripts were read in detail several times; common themes, key points, and relevant passages were coded to nodes. The themes were directly derived from the interviews and in some cases were organized into parental nodes (sub-themes). During the coding process, I had the coding stripes turned on to observe which sections of the interviews had the most density as well as identifying the overlapping of themes. This assisted me in the process of theme revision and selection.

The first categorization led me to the second stage. Grounded theorists refer to this stage as the intermediate coding that establishes categories and the relationship between them (Mills, 2014). At this stage, I looked closer into the coded themes that had emerged inductively from the data to establish generalities and connections. Although I worked with the colour-coded transcripts electronically, the analysis was done by me without any extensive use of the software. It is important to reiterate that software cannot supplement a researcher in grounded theory inquiry; rather, it facilitates the process.

The only purpose of using automated queries was to document and analyze the differences in perceptions of various participant groups. For instance, I ran a query to compare the use of the terms *obshchestvennaya* organization/activist vs. civil society organization/activist, which provided feedback so that I could analyze the differences in perceptions between the political civil society activists, the socially oriented, and the independent activists. The decision to run this query was based on the preliminary analysis. Bearing in mind that query searches

could simplify the data, I used query results only for identifying certain trends and I verified the results by re-reading the selected interview pieces.

The last stage of coding – the advanced coding – is guided by the theoretical relevance and includes creating a storyline, which is key to identifying theory narratives and potential gaps (Mills, 2014). At this stage, I identified data categories in relation to civil society as a middle-tier connector between the top and bottom levels. In the last stage, I also theorized all categories into a broader picture within the research context. As a result, the sections of the empirical chapters (chapters 5-8) were formed.

Research credibility

Qualitative researchers argue for the use of data triangulation to ensure reliability and trustworthiness of research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Triangulation suggests using a variety of information sources and comparing them against each other. In addressing ethical considerations, ensuring the credibility of information through source criticism and data triangulation is necessary, as well as developing a deep understanding of the general research context (Höglund & Öberg, 2011b).

I followed these guidelines and used several sources of information in this thesis, which I described in detail in the Data Collection and Data Analysis sections. In analyzing the study findings, I compared interview responses with the field notes, public opinion polls and reports on Tatarstan's civil society activism.

In grounded theory, the research credibility also rests heavily on the rigour of the "methodological congruence" and "procedural precision" (Mills, 2014). Moreover, the rigour of the research should be combined with its flexibility (Höglund, 2011). I adopted this approach

keeping track of my decisions procedurally and staying committed to the purpose of my research. Reflecting on the interview process and the broader social environment further facilitated the quality of the research.

Challenges and limitations

The interpretation of data is the major challenge in grounded theory research. As Mills (2014) writes, "it is impossible to separate researcher from participant in the generation of data" (ch.7, para. 20). The studied phenomenon always undergoes at least two interpretations: by the research participants in their interviews, and by the researcher when analyzing and interpreting data. In the first case, the challenge for the researcher is to keep track of the conditions that may have impacted the participant's understanding and interpretation of a specific phenomenon. This requires the knowledge of the worlds and sub-worlds to which the respondents belong (Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013). The position of the researcher cannot be completely eliminated from the study findings either. Thus, grounded theorists have to constantly strive to understand the phenomenon from the point of view of the interviewees and reflect on the interactions with them (Mills, 2014).

In my research, I made every effort to address the challenges with data interpretation. To fully understand the participants' interpretation, I analyzed their non-verbal information in addition to the interview responses, which I also studied in detail. Moreover, I paid attention to the social and political context, in which those interpretations developed, carefully recording participants' reactions to interview questions. While it was impossible to eliminate the influence of my individual perspective and other personal characteristics on data interpretation, I reflected

how my positionality impacts the research process. In my writing, I acknowledged how my background could potentially co-construct the research findings.

Purposive sampling could potentially be another challenge in grounded theory research. This sampling is based on the specific characteristics of the selected interviewees (Mills, 2014). In this research, the key attribute was belonging to a civil society group or organization. However, the research also included theoretical sampling, as the study progressed. Theoretical sampling is specific for grounded theory and determines what other data has to be collected and how (Mills, 2014). Moving between data collection and sampling is a challenge that was managed by the preliminary analysis of the interviews, which I used to identify and address gaps in the research sample.

Finally, the generalizability of study findings in qualitative research is limited. Qualitative researchers often prioritize local knowledge to improve local conditions rather than the concept of generalizability (Stringer, 2014). In particular, criticism may concern the generalizability of the research findings outside of the Tatarstan region. Indeed, although the findings may be less relevant for other Russian regions, the purpose of the research was to study the specifics of civil society in Tatarstan and to explore the potential of civil society in the governing process by including multiple voices into civil society agenda. To do so, the research had to use localized visions of civil society and governance in defining the role of civil society and to critically assess the relations between the civil society sector and the government. The awareness of this limitation helped to design the research process accordingly and focus on the findings in terms of their relation to Tatarstan.

Project dissemination

Disseminating project results is an essential part of the grounded theory methodology. To have an impact in the community, the research results have to be disseminated beyond academic journals to be accessible to the key stakeholders (Mills, 2014). PACS researchers also argue that both theorists and practitioners should benefit from the results of the research. Whereas theory must inform practice, theoretic inquiries should also be based on the practical needs of the peacebuilding practice, which would ensure mutual enrichment (Höglund & Öberg, 2011a; Sandole, 2009).

To increase the utility of this research, the results will be shared with Tatarstan's civil society activists. The observations made after the conclusion of the research will be included in the final report. This final written report will be written in Russian and it will be sent to the participants' emails as a blind copy and disseminated to Tatarstan's nonprofit sector workers beyond the research participants. The summary will not contain any identifying or sensitive information.

Conclusion

This research created opportunities to share knowledge, empower civil society activists, and design solutions to existing challenges on the ground. The goal of this study was to understand the role of civil society in locally based political transformation and governance in Tatarstan. Researching the experiences of civil society activists required them to be considered within a specific social and political environment. For these experiences to be voiced, the grounded theory methodology was used. The advantage of the selected methodology was in its ability to develop conclusions based on local knowledge. The methodology included the method

of qualitative semi-structured open-ended interviews, supported by the analysis of secondary sources.

In the following four empirical chapters, I discuss (1) the local understanding of civil society and its differences from the liberal model, (2) public support for civil society initiatives, (3) the relations between the state and civil society, (4) and civil society activists' visions for the future. These sections represent four main themes that emerged from the data collected in the interviews with my study participants.

Chapter 5

Defining Tatarstan's civil society: Local understandings vs. the liberal model

Introduction

The differences in defining civil society hold the keys to envisioning its role in governance and transformation. While definitions are important to ensure a shared cognition of a phenomenon, practitioners rarely participate in their formal development. In their activism, however, they pursue their own understanding of civil society and support its role in the community. Thus, in analyzing Tatarstan's civil society it was important to identify how local civil society activists understand the sector they are representing.

This chapter discusses CSO activists' local understandings of Tatarstan's civil society in their relation to the liberal civil society model. PACS research has argued that the liberal model has been extremely limited in the scope of its locally inspired mechanisms of governing (e.g., Donais, 2012, 2015; Richmond, 2011b). Similarly, in liberalization practices applied in post-Communist settings, people often narrowly perceived civil society as a collection of certain, usually liberal types of NGOs. This understanding of civil society is often referred to as a normative definition, in which civil society is described as a good society and the basis for democracy (Edwards, 2014). The normative definition evaluated the ability of the transitional states to reach the democratic standards of civil society (e.g., Shestopal et al., 2012) and resulted in the exclusion of many forms of local civic activity, leaving the majority of the population alienated from the concept (Silvan, 2015). Defining civil society is particularly complex in the settings that lack institutional capacity or when the independence of those institutions is

undermined. In that case, the epistemological approach to civil society can help envision civil society as a continuing process of negotiation between various sectors (Cory, 2010, pp. 15–17).

In Tatarstan, the complexity of the political environment required a certain level of adaptability from the activists both in their daily jobs and in re-imaging the future of civil society. The collapse of the Soviet system has cleared the way, albeit temporarily, for the civil society organizations that were consistent with the liberal model of civil society. Nevertheless, the breakdown of the political and economic system did not eliminate the Soviet values supportive of the civil society organizations that provide social services (Bindman, 2015; Buxton, 2014). The development of the two branches of the civil society sector has resulted in two different approaches to its understanding. These competing approaches continue to impact the strategies that civil society activists in Tatarstan use to fulfill their mandate.

The interviews have demonstrated a number of essential differences in Tatarstan's civil society model. These themes include (1) the two contesting definitions of civil society; (2) the specifics of Tatarstan's civil society and its transformations from the early 1990s to 2018; (3) the recent developments in the civil society sector that have determined its shape; and (4) the main types of civil society organizations, namely, independent movements, socially oriented organizations and political organizations. In addition, this chapter addresses the impact of CSO activists' local understanding of civil society composition.

All of the themes in this chapter emerged inductively from the interviews. Whereas the study was based on grounded theory, the participants were encouraged to share their own understanding of civil society by either defining it or providing examples of the work of Tatarstan's civil society groups. Although in the study invitation I used the term civil society as *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo*, during the interviews the research participants were asked to

introduce themselves and, in doing so, to define their activism. They were also encouraged to share examples of civil society activism in Tatarstan. Thus, linguistically and content-wise, the study participants offered their own understanding of civil society.

Local definitions of civil society

The research has revealed two dimensions of civic activists' local understanding of Tatarstan's civil society. The first dimension, albeit linguistic, impacts the local understanding of the civil society sector. The two terms generally used to describe civil society in the Russian language are *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* and *obshchestvennost*. As Silvan (2015) notes, the term *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* is a literal translation of the English term civil society, which was adopted in the early 1990s by Yeltsin's administration and revitalized by Vladimir Putin in his endeavor to control the third sector. She contends that this term does not bear the same meaning for Russian civil society activists who see more value in *obshestvennost* as the opposition to the state bureaucracy. These two terms gave birth to two different terms for civil society activists in the Russian language: *grazhdanskii activist* and *obshchestvennik*. The use of *grazhdanskii activist* vs. *obshchestvennik* often reflects prioritizing advocacy CSOs over the CSOs participating in social service delivery.

The research participants used both *grazhdanskii activist* and *obshchestvennik* to describe themselves. The representatives of the socially oriented organizations, and activists who did not belong to a formal organization used these terms interchangeably. However, the representatives of the organizations with a political and/or human rights agenda used the term *grazhdanskii activist* exclusively. This observation suggests that the translated term civil society remained crucial for the organizations pursuing the goals of political democratization. Without the

government repressions pushing them to the margins of the public sphere, these organizations could have organized themselves into parliamentary parties. This linguistic preference also suggested that political activists gave preference to the liberal forms of civil society; this assumption was further supported by their examples of civil society groups. In particular, they mostly named protest groups (both political and apolitical[27]) as civil society organizations.

At the same time, the term *obshchestvennik* remained a strong competitor for the apolitical civil society groups. Many of Tatarstan's civil society activists avoided politicizing their agenda almost at any cost and chose the least controversial term to describe themselves. The word choice also suggests that socially oriented activists focused on somewhat different features of civil society compared to political activists, such as the autonomy from state bureaucracy and the voluntary nature of work.

Regardless of their affiliation, Tatarstan's civil society activists defined the third sector functionally. These activists noted that the most important functions of civil society included service provision, community building, and advocacy to nurture political transformation. However, representatives of the political or human rights-oriented organizations often highlighted civil society's political functions and named protests as a distinct example of civic activity in Tatarstan, such as the demonstrations in support of Alexey Navalny. For instance, Vadim noted: "I think civil society is simply the most politically active part of the society, including voters", whereas Mark highlighted the watchdog function of the civil society noting that, "The most powerful function of the civil society organization is public monitoring".

[27] I use the term apolitical here for civil society groups that do not claim any political goals. However, they may be using political demands as tactics to advance their social and economic causes, for example, calling to investigate or replace individual bureaucrats in relation to their actions causing harm to the environment. The definitions of political and socially oriented groups are discussed further in the chapter.

To the contrary, socially oriented activists emphasized service-provision and community-building functions. Egor reported that, "There are organizations, which maybe have to cooperate with the government but they accomplish a good mission… socially beneficial things. I mean those groups that fight for preserving the clean city."

Although they saw democratizing functions of civil society as less urgent, socially oriented activists did not discredit them completely. Rather, they focused on social capital development without connecting it to democracy building. Thus, Anna highlighted the role of civil society in developing social capital asking, "Who are civil society activists? Small and medium business owners who have a stable income, who can afford to buy two jars of paint for painting a house during the Tom Sawyer Fest[28]. They are the people, who are emotionally capable … [to] throw themselves under the motor graders … [to] stop the cutting down of trees."

These two distinct definitions of civil society emphasized the disagreement within Tatarstan's civil society sector on the value of political advocacy and service provision that resulted in two distinct definitions of civil society. The first approach questioned the mere existence of a meaningful civil society in Tatarstan by pointing out the limitations of its role in governance. For instance, Semyon highlighted the difficulties of defining civil society in Russia as follows:

SEMYON: It is always a matter of judgment where it [civil society] exists. One can argue it doesn't exist anywhere …. Of course, there are small elements of civil society [in Tatarstan] … if we understand civil society as a community of conscious people demonstrating initiative somewhere .... Or should we understand civil society as a space free of government interference? [But] our government interferes everywhere.

[28] During the annual Tom Sawyer Fest, people all over Russia volunteer to restore historic buildings.

The second definition focused on the freedom of people to collectively address current social and economic issues without any guidance from the authorities, as well as the people's ability to generate social capital. The following quote from Sergey summarizes this definition of Tatarstan's civil society:

SERGEY: Well, I think that [civil society] is the … ability of people to self-organize themselves … into informal groups … which should have a significant impact on the [political] climate in general …. So, that even government takes them into consideration. To put it simple, … [civil society is] a complex of the formal and informal associations of citizens based on their interests, which are not created top-down but emerge from their needs.

In their definitions, some of the respondents prioritized democratizing functions of civil society while others focused on service provision. Despite the differences in their definitions, the study participants concluded that civil society groups and organizations perform distinct civil society functions in improving the lives of local people. At the same time, the majority of the informants highlighted that civil society groups and organizations emerged in response to local political and economic conditions. The respondents argued that the needs of local people and the realities of the political regime affected organizational forms of Tatarstan's civil society and its governance agenda.

Political, socially oriented, and independent civil society groups

I have used the terms "political organizations" (or organizations with a political agenda) and "socially oriented organizations" throughout this chapter. The research participants highlighted the significance of this division. The term socially oriented NGOs was introduced by Putin's administration in 2010 to label the nonprofits that focus on service provision. Although this term was created top-down, it was soon appropriated by civil society activists and acquired a negative connotation to suggest that socially oriented organizations can be pro-government. Most often, however, civil society activists distinguished between an orientation to provide social services and an ideological position to support government policies. Hence, the research participants used the term socially oriented to describe the functions of an organization rather than its relations with the government. Egor commented on the important functions of Tatarstan's socially oriented CSOs in the following manner:

> EGOR: Well, there are a number of community organizations that do not enjoy any sort
>
> of support from the government but at the same time they do not oppose the
>
> government[29] … The Soldiers' Mothers of Russia [The Committee
>
> of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia], for example. And this is the organization where, by the
>
> way, men also work. I mean initially it was a women's organization, although clearly not
>
> a feminist [organization], absolutely not a Western organization in that sense. So, they
>
> send newsletters, provide pro bono legal support, and help mothers, who cannot deal
>
> [with the military] on their own, to help their sons, who were drafted to serve in the
>
> army.

[29] Although Egor says that the Soldiers' Mothers of Russia are not being critical of the government, this organization does advocate for the soldiers' rights. However, it is limiting its advocacy activity to one specific issue and it does not take any political stance.

I think these elements [of the Committee's work] are effective; actually, I see these elements as civil society's self-organization …. Tatarstan's practices are interesting. For example, the mobile phones used to be banned in the barracks …. But having no connection with home, they [the soldiers] couldn't tell [their parents] they were abused. So, [The committee of Soldiers' Mothers in Tatarstan] made the case that all the drafted soldiers had the right to have mobile phones.

It was also common to distinguish organizations that concentrate on other civil society functions that could be broadly defined as political (a term used by the research participants), such as advocating for human rights and holding government accountable. Organizations with a political agenda included a vast array of the organizations from extra-parliamentary parties to human rights organizations.

The research participants confirmed the division between socially oriented and political organizations when describing Tatarstan's civil society sector. Each of these two civil society clusters was diverse, with organizations represented under this broad umbrella having little in common in their relations both with the government and with their target groups. Nonetheless, socially oriented organizations outweighed political organizations both in terms of quantity and the diversity of issues they represented.

Among many socially oriented organizations, the respondents named the Children's hospice in Kazan, nonprofits that assisted the reintegration of former offenders or worked with HIV-positive clients. All these organizations were created bottom-up in response to the needs of their target groups to collaborate with the government to serve their clients better. This is how Egor described socially oriented CSOs:

EGOR: I would've divided them [the socially oriented organizations]. First, there are those [organizations] that have to collaborate with the state … but, honestly, [there are socially oriented organizations] that are controlled by the state. They receive money from the state, mostly through government grants. And they have some [important] social functions, for example, national cultural societies …, for example, the societies of Tajiks, Uzbeks …. They actually do a lot for immigrants' adaptation, teach them the Russian language, provide legal support .... I think these are concrete things needed by the people [like] helping [immigrants] to find jobs.

On the other side of this spectrum, there were socially oriented organizations that outsourced government needs and were supervised by the sectoral ministries30, such as students' and other youth organizations. The participants agreed that the government controlled these organizations rigidly, some participants saw certain value in these CSOs. For instance, Anna pointed out that the pro-government youth organizations channeled youth activism into socially positive directions and promoted community-building values. This is what she had to say on the issue:

ANNA: For example, an excellent organization was created by [the activist's name], who is working with volunteers. Whether they have a great outreach or not, they still have a stable group of volunteers, who do their part of work. Yes, they are the youth. And from the point of view of how they benefit the society, they bring together youth … and these

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30 The participants used the term "sectoral ministry" to define ministries that focus on specific issues, for instance, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports supervises any organization that works on those broad issues.

youth do something socially meaningful. At minimum, they are not in the streets … and

this is already a great benefit from this volunteer organization.

The political segment of Tatarstan's civil society sector included extra-parliamentary

parties, social movements, and human rights organizations, while the borders between them were

often blurred. When speaking about Tatarstan's political organizations, the interviewees mostly

defined them as an extra-parliamentary opposition. Russia's extra-parliamentary parties were not

classical parliamentary political parties because they were restricted from running in elections.

Due to the same restrictions, they often avoided the term party and acted as a social movement or

a civil society initiative. For example, an expat opposition leader Mikhail Khodorkovsky called

his organization Open Russia[31] a "community platform" ("Open Russia," n.d.) rather than a

political party. Although Khodorkovsky himself had pursued political goals with Open Russia on

the "foreign agent" list and its website was blocked in Russia since 2017, he could only operate

his organization as a nonprofit. Simultaneously, Khodorkovsky's initiative was aimed at human

rights advocacy and represented civil society activists from different organizations in courts.

As political and human rights advocacy was severely restricted in Russia, there were

fewer political organizations in Tatarstan. The core issues for all political organizations were the

endorsement of political rights and freedoms, and advocacy for free and fair local and federal

elections. Although in practice socially oriented organizations also advocated for the rights of

their clients (e.g., the rights of HIV-positive people), they never framed this work as human

rights advocacy.

In general, the study participants knew more about the organizations with a non-political

agenda. They believed that CSOs that had a political agenda had lower support among the

[31] Khodorkovsky made a decision to dissolve his organization in March 2019.

population. The research participants asserted that the support for political CSOs was lower than people declared in public opinion polls. Anna and Egor argued that despite the fact that roughly one third of the population in Tatarstan claimed it would take to the streets to advocate for their rights, in practice these numbers were significantly smaller, and only a tiny proportion of the population was regularly involved in political activism.

Respondents spoke about the low level of support for political organizations, including those activists that represented them. Vadim had the following to say on the issue:

VADIM: Opposition movement, [and political] parties in general, have very low support … Open Russia has no such support. Or … let's take Yabloko party, who knows about it, where is their office? How many people can they bring together? ... PARNAS? They don't exist. They have discredited themselves.

The research participants explained their distrust of Tatarstan's political CSOs. Political activists attributed the distrust of their organizations to the crooked political system that made all politicians look corrupt and the parliamentary opposition futile. Ilshat noted the following in his story:

ILSHAT: We have parliamentary parties, which, in reality, are one party with different factions … they used to oppose Kremlin but now they have a complete idyll. In other words, everyone supports the war [in Ukraine], everyone supports sanctions, everyone supports Crimea annexation and so on …. So, people think that all these [parliamentary] parties are bastards and the other [parties] are bastards too.

Conversely, non-political activists argued that these organizations did not represent their interests and that they pursued their own political agenda instead. Although many unregistered civil society groups often collaborated with the extra-parliamentary opposition, they believed these organizations cared only for political profit. When elaborating on the political organizations' support of environmentalist groups, Ivan contended that none of the political parties reflects his point of view:

IVAN: I personally do not relate to the opposition. But I also cannot trust the pro-government [organizations]. I personally do not see any [political] party that would reflect my viewpoint, it simply does not exist …. Any party only cares for their PR and any question, whether it's important or not, to them [is] just an operational issue .... To them, it's all the same, they only care about the number of rallies …. Actually, the issue [of the environment] is not important to them, it's important only to us.

The respondents representing socially oriented organizations also felt alienated from the political segment of civil society. They felt little support for their cause from the extra-parliamentary parties if their agenda did not reach federal headlines. Karina reported on this issue in the following manner:

KARINA: [They think that] the problem of having the same President is more relevant. And then … social protests are only supported by those who are in the same situation. [Politically-oriented activists] are more [interested] in rhetorical problems maybe because

[these problems] are more inclusive and can attract more people.

With the exception of Alexey Navalny, political organizations were struggling to recruit new members. Socially oriented activists explained that political organizations had not changed in recent years. Egor articulated that having the same people in charge made political organizations less attractive to Tatarstan's residents. He argued that the majority of political activists had been employed by their organizations during the past 10-15 years and engaged in protest activity unselectively convincing other activists of their lack of principles. Political constraints also led to fewer new faces in the political realm of in Tatarstan's civil society. As a result, Anna contended that political civil society lacked the diversity of people and ideas:

ANNA: Since 2013 … there have been the same people on the [political] stage. There may be a few new young people, literally 3-4 persons, and that's it. All these people [in political organizations] change their ideological affiliations from time to time. But [they] are always against the same person [Putin]. And that's not an ideological position.

Remarkably, the study participants did not mention fear of persecution as an obstacle for the public to support political organizations. Rather, they believed that supporting political organizations created barriers for apolitical activists (who could otherwise negotiate with the government) to achieve their goal. Karina asserted that many people show up at social protests and cannot be detained by the security forces:

KARINA: If it is a social protest, we know that despite any violations, these people will

not get hurt… They declare 300 people [participated in their meeting] – 500 show up. They should've arrested the organizer [but] the authorities can't do that. [They] can't because it's a social aspect. It affects enough of the population. If people were deceived once and then [the government] acts violently, that's it, then the same people would go to Navalny's rally.

Therefore, many organizations and groups do not take any political stance to solve their problems in collaboration with the government. Karina believed that, "… in Tatarstan, social [protest] is and has always been well developed. Yes, people needed to protest for years … but their problem would be solved… [Did it take] long? Yes. [Was it] painful? Yes… But [the problems] were [always] solved."

Political and socially oriented organizations were divided according to their relations with the government and their access to funding. Socially oriented organizations were eligible for government funding at least in theory, whereas political organizations were cut off from this opportunity and from foreign funding sources. Contrary to the popular opinion promoted in the media (see, for example, Zakharova, 2016), not every socially oriented organization received government funding. Many representatives of socially oriented organizations spoke about their struggles to obtain funding, especially when they concentrated on the issues that were neglected or denied by the government, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemics in Tatarstan. Karim pointed out the struggles of the CSOs working with HIV positive clients as follows:

KARIM: My [personal] and my organization's take on it is that the state is doing nothing to prevent the HIV epidemics. Today we, I mean Eastern Europe, has shown some 65

percent increase [in the number of HIV-positive people], when in Africa it's been only 10 percent. We have 65 percent new cases of HIV. The state doesn't take it seriously, there are no prevention programs, not comprehensive ones, [there is no] adequate financing to the [HIV] prevention programs. This is the biggest problem for us.

In the past few years, the boundaries between political and socially oriented organizations were challenged by the emergence of a new type of civil society activism in Tatarstan. Some civil society activists chose to operate independently without joining any formal organization. Most of these independent32 civil society groups were initiated as a response to a specific issue, and either dissolved when the issue was resolved (or when the participants burned out and quit) or moved to another similar activity. For example, the activists who united against the building of the waste incineration plant in Kazan had no previous environmental experience. They were stunned by the perspective of having such a facility close to their homes so they began advocating against it, finding supporters initially through social networks. According to Egor, spontaneous mobilization started with the cases of missing children. He noted the following in his story:

EGOR: When, for example, a girl goes missing, and … a half of the city of Naberezhnye Chelny is looking for her. So, naturally, no one forced these people, no one authorized them, the state didn't make them go anywhere. There is no state enforcement here, and it's really great when people search [for the missing children] independently [from the state].

32 The activists did not consistently call themselves *independent*. However, in the course of their interviews, they highlighted that they did not belong to any formal organization. Thus, I have used the term *independent* to distinguish them from *political* and *socially oriented* activists.

This type of civic activity was relatively new in Tatarstan, and many activists working in traditional NGOs also agreed that the classical NGO format could not be effective. Karim (a representative of a socially oriented NGO) spoke on the issue in the following manner:

KARIM: [Civic activity] will convert into other forms. I think this [an NGO] form has exhausted itself in our setting, perhaps, even in theirs [refers to the Western countries]. It will simply move, like it [happens] today to Twitter, Instagram, somewhere else. Somewhere, where it's not forbidden. Somewhere, where you can safely sit and write what you think, and, well, simply fundraise.

On the one hand, the unregistered groups cut themselves off from any government funding. On the other hand, these groups were free to receive funding from foreign individuals and organizations without being labeled as "foreign agents." For example, the activists working to protect stray animals often found them homes abroad. Foreign individuals volunteered to pay animal adoption costs without the activists needing to file official reports.

Another reason for Tatarstan activists to choose a loosely organized movement over a registered NGO was because of the movement's efficiency to withstand government pressure. A registered NGO could be legally shut down by the government within a matter of days, even hours. The continuous audits and police investigations pressured it into conformity. In contrast, the unregistered groups were organized and governed themselves democratically. Instead of a single leadership, all members were responsible for taking the initiative and making decisions. Lilia pointed this contrast out in the following way:

LILIA: What's important – we don't have a single center, [there is] no single person that coordinates all the work. We have an action group, we have leaders of the action group. Why [is it] good? It's like a monster with multiple heads, right? One [of us] could be pressured, another one could get sick, the third could get scared, the fourth could have a conflict of interest. But they cannot defeat everyone.

In addition, registering and sustaining an NGO required a certain investment from its members, which many of Tatarstan's civil society activists did not have. For example, Anna worked closely with women who struggled to organize a support group for mothers with children with developmental disorders. She explained that these mothers did not have the financial means to register an NGO despite the fact that the registration fee was relatively small. So, their only way of supporting each other was via social media.

The advancement of social networks played a decisive role in the development of Tatarstan's unregistered civil society groups. The majority of the research participants mentioned the Internet, and social networks in particular, as their main communication tool. The Internet provided freedom to the informal movements to communicate and advance their support groups, fundraise, and discuss their agenda in the independent media sources. The payoff for this freedom was the activists' visibility (and to some extent vulnerability) to government agencies. Independent activists joked when they signed their consent forms that the government already knew significantly more about their lives than they shared with me in the interview.

A political activist Ilshat was upset that the new movements avoided close cooperation with political parties. This is what Ilshat had to say on the issue:

ILSHAT: We even collaborate with this *obshchestvenniki* if they approach us with some

questions … but they [independent activists] often make a decision that we [should] not

use any party symbols. In other words, we cannot bring any [party symbols] so they

would not be considered politically biased.

Finally, although many of the independent groups did not pursue political goals, they

often turned to protest activity if they believed that it was necessary to promote their agenda. The

unregistered groups also demonstrated flexibility in their partnerships. They cooperated tactically

with any CSO willing to support their cause. Strategically, however, they distanced themselves

from political parties, in particular, those that received foreign funding, such as Open Russia.

Tatarstan's civil society sector development and transformation

The interviewees pointed out the divide between civil society development in the 1990s

and in the 2000s. In the academic literature, the 1990s period in Russia is frequently described as

an attempt, although largely unsuccessful, at post-Communist democratic transition (Evans,

2011; Politkovskaĭa, 2005; Rose, Mishler, & Munro, 2011). In everyday Russia, however, this

period is often referred to as *likhie* 90e – "the wild and evil '90s" due to rapid privatization and

liberalization in the form of "shock therapy" when the speedy dismantling of the Soviet welfare

system resulted in corruption, extreme poverty, high unemployment, and rising crime rates

(Wilson, 2014).

The majority of socially oriented activists shared the latter view of the early years of the

development of Tatarstan's civil society. They described the 1990s as "chaotic" and "difficult

times." They argued that civil society did not fully exist during those years. For instance, Egor noted that, "We've already seen the total chaos … of the 1990s …. And then, later, the strengthening of the state gave birth to civil society." Similarly, Ilsiyar (who worked in a youth organization) highlighted in her narrative high crime rates, street gangs, and overall difficult times for youth.

Many socially oriented organizations dependent on current government funding argue that the 1990s were associated with a lack of people's interest in any unpaid activity including participating in civil society projects. The former Soviet Union's government controlled formal associations (such as unions and sports clubs). It forced people to participate in their activities. As a result, many Russians tried to distance themselves from voluntary associations relying on personal networks instead (Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013). The end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s also witnessed the rise in civic activity previously thought impossible in the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, foreign funding was targeted on human rights issues (Bindman, 2015), which benefitted the development of the political segment of civil society.

The respondents representing a number of political organizations mentioned this increase in civic activity during Yeltsin's presidency. In his interview Ilshat noted that, "In the early 1990s, we had … a rise [in activism]. People went around, like, collecting signatures [to nominate political candidates] for free … Then that sort of Yeltsyn's time ended. Especially after the [Yeltsyn's] first term, people became disappointed." Similarly, Semyon identified the 1990s with a higher level of participation in the civil society sector. He contended that,

"During that period, people believed in something, they were inspired [to do something]. It was somewhat spontaneous, somewhat unorganized, but it was good in a sense that something happened inside those people and they suddenly started doing something."

The research participants agreed that political liberalization was necessary for the emergence of the civil society sector in the 1990s. The 1993 constitution granted new democratic rights and freedoms to Russian citizens, including freedom of speech and assembly. Ironically, the new constitution was drafted after the violent repression of the opposition. The use of military force to dissolve and re-elect a new parliament loyal to Boris Yeltsin, signified how short-lived political reforms were in Russia. Nevertheless, it became possible to hold free elections, and new and diverse political parties emerged. Egor described this period in the following way:

> EGOR: … not so much of democratization, more like liberalization … *Perestroika, glasnost*, all the 1990s from the point of view of proposing something, re-electing the boss, all these elections ... sometimes it was even ridiculous. But it did happen, didn't it? People participated, didn't they? Many wanted to believe that they can make a difference, right?

Meanwhile, the civil society sector remained largely unregulated. On the negative side, the liberalizing civil society sector left most socially oriented organizations on the edge of survival. On the positive side, diverse bottom-up CSOs emerged, and most of them were at that point of time independent of the government. The removal of government restrictions in the civic sphere allowed certain civil society groups to prosper.

In the early 1990s, Tatarstan was a leader of political decentralization. Thus, the benefits of liberalization were particularly true for the nationalist organizations and movements in Tatarstan. Semyon reported how different CSOs began to prosper in Russia after the collapse of the USSR:

> SEMYON: The 1990s were more interesting in this aspect. The time was interesting, if we are talking about civil society, from the point of view of nationalist movements or just democratic movements and [their] aspiration to change something. But this [was] after the Soviet period, when they [the government] had to sort of let it go, and different [civil society] forms emerged.

In the early 1990s, nationalist movements, such as Ittifaq and VTOTs, were a prominent part of Tatarstan's civil society sector. Nonetheless, Lilia asserted that, "this part [of the civil society sector] starting from the 1990s has always been played by those who called for sovereignty." Throughout Shaimiev's presidency, his support of nationalist movements remained a priority internally due to the growing opposition to his administration. Ilya articulated that, "During Shaimiev ['s regime], there was [political] competition. It was rather imposed, not because Shaimiev was a democrat, but because in the 1990s there were different groups and there was some legal opposition, which they [Shaimiev's administration] had to take into consideration."

The rise of nationalist organizations in Tatarstan was relatively short lived. By the 2000s, nationalist organizations in the region were mostly controlled by the local government. Federal pressure also contributed to the diminishing role of Tatarstan's nationalist organizations. For

example, Ilya noted that, "The federal center has been cleansing out Russian nationalist groups for several years … now they've moved to the Tatar most radical [nationalist organizations]. Namely, during this year [2017] the VTOTs branch in Naberezhnye Chelny was closed and considered extremist."

In 2017, the debate about the status of the Tatar language culminated in the process of suppressing Tatarstan's nationalist organizations. In the early 1990s, special language "policies have legitimized the Tatar identity alongside Russian from the top-down perspective" (Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016, p. 20). The Constitution of Tatarstan proclaimed both Russian and Tatar as official languages. They had also been taught as the two native languages in all secondary schools. Russian-speaking parents have long advocated for reducing Tatar lessons for their children. Before 2017, however, these complaints did not receive any significant attention neither from the regional nor the federal authorities. The debate escalated in summer 2017 when Vladimir Putin made a comment about Russians being "forced" to study the languages of ethnic minorities ("Putin sparks controversy with remarks on Russian, minority languages," 2017). Despite the Tatarstan government's attempts to push back, it eventually accepted the federal decision and passed a new school curriculum. Now, students needed parental consent to study the Tatar language for more than 2 hours a week (instead of the existing compulsory 6 hours per week).

Respondents argued that this decision was especially damaging to CSOs promoting the Tatar language and culture. Many nationalist organizations had given up on their sovereignty agenda in the late 1990s and closely collaborated with the local government. They perceived this cooperation as mutually beneficial because the NGOs raised support for the Tatar population to the local government, and the authorities generously supported their activities. When the federal

and regional governments attacked the core issue of the Tatar language, nationalist organizations were pushed further to the margins of the civil society sector.

The interviewee's agreed that Putin's rise to power impacted the civil society sector. Tatarstan's political civil society had to transform itself alongside the nationalist organizations. Initially, the number of political parties in the Russian parliament and in regional legislatures declined and many political parties were pushed to the margins of political life (Gel'man, 2015). Some transformed themselves into the so-called extra-parliamentary opposition, which could not participate in the elections and opposed the government as informal social movements or parties. For example, Ilya argued that, "All the uncontrolled civic protest activity was gradually pushed from the state into the streets. In other words, if in the 1990s there were various competitors represented in the parliament, in the mid-2000s there were only a few people who … [had] an independent opinion. Now [the parliament] is completely controlled."

The 2011-2012 protests climaxed in this tightening relationship between the political wing of civil society and the authorities, both federally and regionally. In Tatarstan, even though the 2011-2012 protests were smaller than those in Moscow and St. Petersburg, they urged the government to tighten civil society regulations. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 fragmented the opposition further. For example, Ilya articulated that, "[In 2011], there was consolidation of different groups: civil society, political parties, Tatar nationalists, Russian nationalists everyone [was] together. Then they split. Russian nationalists decided that Putin was good after all."

Due to the tensions between the federal center and local authorities, the situation changed for other civil society groups. In the early 2000s, many socially oriented NGOs benefitted from their relationship with the regional government. The international community's economic sanctions put in place after Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the banking crisis of 2017

diminished government support for socially oriented organizations. According to Egor, economic

pressures changed the shape of Tatarstan's socially oriented civil society:

> EGOR: For two years, we have been witnessing a completely different situation when the
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> federal center has dominated the regions heavily, including Tatarstan. The banking crisis
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> of the 2016-2017, the changes in the republic's leadership, the appointment of the new
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> prime minister [of Tatarstan] with the Russian last name … all these things were
>
> impossible five years ago.

Despite the dramatic political changes, some study participants suggested that there is

continuity within civil society sector development in Tatarstan. Karina noted that people remain

politically active joining many different organizations:

> KARINA: [Civil society in Tatarstan] exists and that's good … I'd say political civic
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> activity hasn't died down since the collapse of the [Soviet] Union. In other words, people
>
> have regularly joined political actions, rallies, pickets. And usually these activists are
>
> motivated, obviously, by … different political [and] social aspects.

Since the end of the 1990s, Tatarstan's civil society sector transformed considerably. The

civil society's political sector, in particular nationalist organizations, experienced increasing

pressure from both local and federal governments. Some of these organizations continued to

operate even in the tightening political environment. Nevertheless, most of the political civil

society groups in 2017-2018 acted as informal social movements. Finally, the changing

economic conditions briefly benefitted Tatarstan's socially oriented CSOs.

The shape of Tatarstan's civil society sector

Tatarstan's CSOs shared a lot in common with similar organizations in other Russian regions. The majority of the research participants pointed out that there are cross-regional similarities. Egor commented on the fact that Tatarstan is firmly entrenched within the Russian political context, as the nationalist agitation of the 1990s has diminished:

EGOR: Tatarstan is … an inherent part of the Russian Federation. In the early 1990s, the times were slightly different … there were … groups of nationalists that thought that we were outside Russia. But I think those times are gone …. Tatarstan is one of the regions, of course, with its one specificity.

Despite certain similarities, Tatarstan's civil society sector has developed differently from the other regional civil societies in Russia. Tatarstan's specificity has allowed *national republics* to allocate resources to regional budgets and to enact distinct regional legislation. Regional distinctions impacted both political and socially oriented organizations. CSOs that have a distinct political agenda enjoyed different levels of popular support for their activism, in contrast socially oriented organizations often deviate in the amount of regional government funding that are allocated to them. As the social and economic differences among Russian regions continue to rise, they inevitably impact the distribution of funding to civil society projects and impact the motivation of people to support CSOs.

The most drastic regional distinction, however, fell between the two *federal cities33* – Moscow and St. Petersburg – and the rest of the country. Both Moscow and St. Petersburg are the centers of political life in Russia. St. Petersburg lost its status as the official capital shortly after the Bolshevik October 1917 revolution yet it still remains the "cultural capital" of Russia. Both cities are well-known for housing the relatively strong political wing of civil society. Accordingly, civil society research in Russia has geographically focused on Moscow (and St. Petersburg to some extent) as the centers of political leadership (Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010). Nevertheless, these two cities are very distinct economically, and their residents are far less concerned about basic survival and fulfilling people's basic human needs. Anna pointed out that individuals living outside both cities seeking employment are more cognizant of getting on the authorities' radar by becoming socially active:

> ANNA: If Moscow [and] St. Petersburg are the one form of civic political activism, then the regions are the other form of civic political activism. Moscow and St. Petersburg are the central regions, which don't worry about their inner job market in the future; [they are] the regions that people travel to for jobs. Contrarily, the regions outside the "capitals" are still trying to balance the fact that employment attaches people to a specific ... job market. And the person will think twice before doing something that could simply hurt – not just his career – but his access to the means of living.

In addition, Moscow is also the national capital, which has made any political protests in the city a national issue and it has pressured municipal authorities to negotiate with the

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33 *A city of federal importance* (colloquially, a *federal city*) is a constitutional term for the three *federal subjects:* Moscow, St. Petersburg and Sevastopol (the latter was added to the Russian constitution after the annexation of Crimea).

protestors. Tatarstan activist Vadim confirmed that Moscow's civil society activism and resistance was a special case compared to Kazan's:

> VADIM: For example, how do people react to the unlawful rejection of rallies in Moscow? They just come to the rally and that's it. Yes, there will be police brutality … but it's not deadly, the law is on our side. Eventually, the people have pressured the authorities to allow rallies in Moscow. Because it's a huge stress for the municipal government if every time in the center of Moscow … there are mass beatings of people … they realized that they do not need a *Maidan* [refers to the revolution in Ukraine]. And here, in Kazan, we don't have this political culture, such feisty people who would lead others.

The majority of my respondents argued against the point that the role of civil society in Russia's regions was close to zero (e.g., Shestopal et al., 2012). Although Tatarstan did not demonstrate significantly higher numbers of protest activity compared to other Russian regions, the respondents observed the diversity of civil society initiatives and the commitment of civic activists. Ilshat noted that, "there is an opinion that Russia has no civil society and people … don't care, they don't want anything. Actually, I don't think so. I mean there are people, although maybe not too many." In addition, Vadim reported that, "When it comes to civil society in Tatarstan, of course, it exists. We really have a lot of protest groups now, really a lot. In the past years, their number has increased." These opinions are confirmed by the independent research on regional protest activity. In April 2019, Tatarstan moved up to 7th place (out of 85) in the rating of protest within only a few months (Institute of Regional Expertise, 2019b).

Nevertheless, the new laws introduced and enforced by Moscow impacted the shape of civil society emerging in Tatarstan. The creation of the Public Chamber and the new legislation has further increased the power of the Justice Ministry to monitor NGOs (Johnson & Saarinen, 2011). The infamous "foreign agent law" obliged Tatarstan's nonprofits to disclose any foreign funding that they received. Once labeled as "foreign agents," NGOs were subjected to more scrutiny and authorities intervened and suspended their activities. My respondents pointed out that while human rights organizations suffered from these repressions the most, some of Tatarstan's socially oriented organizations (in particular, working in the sphere of HIV/AIDS prevention) were also constrained by the "foreign agent law."

In general, activists representing organizations with a political agenda were more cautious in their assessment of Tatarstan's civil society sector. They identified connections between the federal and local levels, as well as some of the political causes behind the problems encountered by the civil society sector. Representatives of the socially oriented organizations were slightly more optimistic in their evaluation of the civil society sector. They suggested that the growing number of NGOs working in different spheres demonstrated the vibrancy of civil society. For instance, Rezeda claimed that, "They work [in] almost all spheres of life… [NGOs] help the ill children, [protect] the environment, you name it, NGOs work everywhere".

Key features of Tatarstan's civil society

The study participants argued that six key features shape Tatarstan's civil society sector. First, critical issues that united people into civil society groups were limited to certain causes. Dinar reflected on this issue in the following manner:

DINAR: So, we can't say that civil society here is dead and it doesn't exist, because we see a very serious discussion, people take positions and advocate for them accordingly. And this demonstrates that the level of activism is high [in support] of certain causes, I mean those [causes] that are important for people… civil society unites around specific issues, for example, the [Tatar] language question.

The respondents contended that the causes that unite people into civil society groups included issues that were most vital and close to home, in particular, environmental causes. The environment is a basic human need and it unites people despite all odds. Moreover, the representatives of both political and socially oriented organizations recognize that the environment is a key issue in the civil society domain. It was also the issue that many participants felt very emotional about, as it is something that directly impacts their lives and the lives of their children.

In recent years, environmentalist groups have advocated against building a waste incineration plant and the backfilling of the Volga river creek to build upscale property. They have succeeded in preserving a natural lake close to downtown Kazan and they failed to prevent the destruction of a grove, which was transformed into a parking lot for the FIFA World Cup games. Detailing the most important civil society projects, Egor asserted that, "It's the sphere of the environment … [when] something happens to our family, to children … these basic needs … can unite people from the point of view of civic activity."

Environmentalist groups demonstrated the second distinct feature of Tatarstan's civil society sector. Many civil society activists withdrew from formally registering an NGO and instead opted to join unregistered groups and movements. This was especially true for

environmental and animal protection groups. Although these groups cooperated with the formal NGOs, the majority of the environmental groups often operated as loosely affiliated groups that united people around a specific cause or issue. For instance, when the private company connected to the Tatarstan elite started the backfilling of the Volga river creek, people living in that area started spontaneously organizing themselves to resist via social networks. Their centre of gravity was always connected to the Volga crisis; they never intended to register as an NGO or work on other environmental issues. Later, some continued helping other activists to work on various projects. This is how Lilia describes her first experience of organizing an environmental protection group:

> LILIA: And then I understood, when I saw people [protesting], I understood that I am not the only one, who cares about this territory, [where] I used to bike and fish with my Dad since I was a child … All these [childhood memories] motivated me to step up to saving this world, especially because this world does not belong to anyone. It equally belongs to people, animals, and nature forces …. And when I saw people, I started to act as a civic activist. I started to speak at rallies, come to meetings, and then [became] one of the organizers [of the civil society group].

Similarly, Tatarstan's animal protection groups operated as networks of activists, using social media to collaborate and fundraise. These groups acted as a community of like-minded people. Alfia reported that, "I do not belong to any movement … [or] organization…. We do … have animal protection groups, where we help each other, there are people who provide financial support. We have sort of a community."

The unpaid nature of work was named as another key feature of Tatarstan's civil society sector. The very definition of a civic activist as *obshchestvennik* often implies the unpaid nature of this type of work. In the Soviet Union, this term signified work done in addition to one's official working duties. Many independent activists in particular, refused to describe their activism as *rabota,* which means both work and job in Russian. They saw civil society activism as synonymous to volunteering. Most of all, the unorganized movements could not afford to pay their members. On the contrary, the members of such groups often invested their own money into their projects (such as establishing animal shelters).

Although the civil society sphere was considerably professionalized, civil society activism still remained a vocation for people rather than a paid job. When I asked the interviewees to introduce themselves, the majority named both their activism and paid employment at the beginning of each interview. Even those activists, who succeeded in establishing a formal NGO and had a salary, needed a different source of income to support themselves. Maria shared her concern about the future of her organization noting that, "I have no … material benefits from this job. Young people understand that, thus, there's no one willing to take over my job. But I need to get married [and] have children."

The voluntary nature of work reduced the participants' leverage and convinced the general public that civil society lacked professionalism. Government officials also used this argument when countering the appeals from civil society activists. The activists demonstrated, however, that they had enough knowledge and expertise to advocate for their causes. Some, like Lilia, received additional education and training to validate their competence.

The fourth distinctive feature of Tatarstan's civil society sector is the significant affiliation of the socially oriented CSOs with the government. The participants used the term

okologosudarstvennaya – near the state – to describe Tatarstan's civil society. Damir highlighted the potential of the organizations that collaborated with the government noting that to be "near the state" was not necessarily disadvantageous. "Civil society organizations in the Republic, the ones that really work, they are near the state. They can't and don't want to live without government support … those organizations that are really strong [and] do something – they are all near the state."

Another term that the research participants used – *progosudarstvennaya* (pro-state) – had a more negative connotation. Not only were some CSOs "near the state", they were "under the state" and actively supported government policies. This term was mainly used for the NGOs working "under" the sectoral ministries to outsource service provisions to communities. Some research participants believed that this model of government support was necessary to make Tatarstan's CSOs viable and that pro-state NGOs accomplished an important mission of service-provision. Egor explained that, "there are organizations, which … had to cooperate with the government, but [they] accomplish a good mission and do socially important things." Still, many activists worried that the tight affiliation between the government and NGOs weakened civil society's potential to protest government decisions. Ilshat reported that, "[The government] necessarily needs someone to be the boss there [at an NGO], whom they can call and tell not to join a protest today or not to push your initiative."

Fifth, the NGOs' dependency on government shaped civil society to deal with immediate needs instead of promoting a systemic approach to problems. The pro-state organizations promoting sports and music attracted predominantly youth volunteers looking for fun and engaging events. Damir suggested that Tatarstan's pro-state organizations generated certain expectations from young activists:

DAMIR: Again, we have 'near the state' volunteering aimed at events, sports ….

[Volunteers] are dressed in nice outfits, they are happy, but … what if we ask [them] to

do difficult systemic work, for instance, working with the HIV-positive people or …

helping disabled people?

Finally, the majority of research participants across civil society sub-sectors argued that

Tatarstan's civil society had a non-systemic nature. They pointed out that the sporadic bursts of

protest activity in Tatarstan were caused by economic, social or environmental crises. Semyon

had the following to say on the issue:

SEMYON: This [protest activity] does not have any systemic nature, and does not have a

periodic nature … I mean, it's like – bang – a match is lit and [then] gone out. The next

time something happens – something again is lit and [then] gone out. It's not like people

are active everywhere and all the time trying to protect their rights or do something good

[or] demonstrate their initiative.

Although civil society activists identified the need for CSOs to move away from this

approach and create a more sustainable form of civil society, they concentrated on alarming

people of potential dangers and acting as the last line of defense. For instance, Lilia noted that

her group tried to attract the public's attention to environmental problems yet they could not

resolve them permanently without popular support. She believed that only education and popular

support could transform Tatarstan's un-systemic civil society.

Overall, the shape of the civil society sector demonstrated not only its strong affiliation with the government but also the interest of the government in maintaining the dubious nature of civil society thereby weakening it. On the one hand, organizations affiliated with the government were encouraged to develop sustainable leadership and services. On the other hand, when the government could not prevent uncontrolled civic activism completely, it tried to keep the civil society sector disorganized. As Ilya noted, these groups were the government's "headache" yet were not persecuted in order to avoid their radicalization.

Discussions and findings

In defining Tatarstan's civil society sector, the research participants indicated several main themes: (1) the two contesting definitions of civil society, (2) the specifics of Tatarstan's civil society and its transformation from the early 1990s to 2018, (3) the trends of civil society development which determined its shape, and (4) the types of civil society organizations that operate in Tatarstan, i.e., independent movements, socially oriented organizations, and political organizations. These themes prompted the following six conclusions.

The two definitions of civil society. Tatarstan's civil society activists had two different approaches to defining civil society depending on the sector they represented. The study participants from political or human rights organizations were more comfortable with the liberal definitions of civil society. They understood civil society as a key force in economic liberalization and political democratization, and highlighted the role of civil society in advancing democracy in Tatarstan and Russia in general. Political activists insisted on using the term *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo,* which was a term literally translated from English, instead of the

traditional Russian term, *obshchestvennost*. They noted that *obshchestvennost* often lacked the institutional capacity to participate in governance, let alone transform a non-democratic system.

The exclusion of the more traditional CSOs from the civil society definition limited the capacity of political organizations to seek potential partners beyond their immediate allies. The adherence of political activists to democratizing functions narrowed their understanding of the civil society sphere in Tatarstan to a relatively small group of political organizations and protest movements. For the most part, the political activists did not consider the apolitical CSOs and activists as part of civil society and, as a result, did not contemplate partnering with them. Exceptions were only made for a few environmental movements, which were likely to politicize their agenda.

Political activists also insisted that only politically active citizens should be considered as civil society. Several study participants from the political CSOs argued that society (*obshchestvo)* was too amorphous and should not be considered equal to political structures and institutions. Civil society (*grazhdanskoe obshchestvo*), on the other hand, could become the missing institutional structure of Russian society if it is based on the liberal model. Consequently, this civil society definition also excluded a significant part of the population from the civil society realm.

Representatives of other civil society segments – socially oriented and independent activists – strove to reconcile both terms and used them interchangeably. This suggests that for the civic activists, who did not have an active political agenda, civil society merged a variety of functions, with the leading functions of service provision and community building. The use of the term *obshchestvennik* did not merely signify the apolitical stance of these activists but it also allowed them to expand the civil society sphere beyond formal organizations to include informal

groups and movements. In this definition of civil society, the activists did not view democratization as the only priority in the context of Tatarstan. They also advocated for addressing the basic needs of the population. Despite the fact that socially oriented and independent activists focused mostly on service provision and community-building functions in their civil society definitions, all but the pro-government activists recognized the need for having political CSOs that would advocate for democratization in Tatarstan and Russia in general. This second approach to defining civil society demonstrated that the independent and most of the socially oriented study participants were open to building more diverse civil society alliances with political CSOs.

In addition, independent activists prioritized the ability of civil society to generate social capital yet, unlike the study participants from the political CSOs, they did not anticipate that social capital would directly foster democracy. Instead, they focused on practical ways of using social capital to promote communal support. Thus, the independent participants were less focused on the institutional dimensions of civil society and instead they concentrated more on the process of designing new civil society forms in Tatarstan. This perspective illustrated the flexibility of Tatarstan's independent movements in identifying groups and individuals as civil society members.

One of the elements that united civil society definitions across the civil society sectors was the activists' understanding of civil society as a combination of certain functions. On the one hand, the list of these functions demonstrated that the local understanding of civil society mostly corresponded to the functions of civil society outlined in the academic literature (see, for example, Edwards, 2014), such as creating social capital, advocating for citizens' rights, community-building, and service provision. On the other hand, a significant proportion of civic

activists continued to prioritize service provision in opposition to the small segment of civil society members, who were concerned with political rights and freedoms.

However, the two different civil society definitions used by the study participants had a much deeper implication than just illustrating civil society's division of labour. Both of these approaches to understanding civil society highlighted the validity of different types of CSOs in the eyes of the study participants, and their willingness to connect with other civil society sub-sectors. While both definitions reflected the history of Tatarstan's civil society model, they also set the goals for the future. By selecting *grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* or *obshchestvennost*, the study participants expressed their preference for either re-building Tatarstan's civil society model completely or incorporating successful local lessons into this model.

Civil society's subsectors. The distinction in the definitions highlighted the divide between the three segments of Tatarstan's civil society: socially oriented organizations, organizations that pursued a political (or human rights) agenda, and groups and social movements that were not officially registered and gathered spontaneously in response to certain issues. The division of Tatarstan's CSOs into three main sub-groups suggested that each of these CSO groups could not separately and effectively fulfill all of the civil society functions. The activists were searching for new forms of civil society activism to be able to respond to the new challenges. Whereas the division of politically and socially oriented CSOs had existed since the early 1990s, the independent civic groups were relatively new in Tatarstan.

The division between socially oriented and political organizations was not based solely on their relations with the government. The majority of CSOs that could be defined as political represented the extra-parliamentary opposition and combined political ambition with an active human rights agenda. Organizationally, some were registered political parties, and others

functioned as civil society movements. Political activists in Tatarstan associated civil society with the protest activity for political and non-political (social, economic) causes. However, within this protest activity, they clearly identified themselves as a separate element and strategically raised the question of democratic transformation, whereas other civil society groups protested against certain government decisions or bureaucrats ad hoc.

Although familiar with other segments of the civil society sector, political activists did not perceive them as a significant force in political transformation or governance. Political activists believed that the apolitical segments of civil society were turning a blind eye to the sources of social and economic problems in Tatarstan, namely, the current political regime and its leader Vladimir Putin. Hence, Tatarstan's political activists perceived themselves as the only force advocating for political democratization.

The socially oriented sector had more nuanced relations with the authorities and was very diverse in its goals, strategies, and relations with the government. The research participants suggested that relations with the government could be the key criteria in categorizing socially oriented CSOs. According to these criteria, socially oriented organizations could be either created bottom-up in response to the needs of a target group or be integrated into ministries to implement a government-improved agenda. The latter was referred to as *progosudarstvennaya* – a pro-state organization.

Although the representatives of the pro-state organizations did not refer to themselves as such, they agreed that the support from the government granted them a unique status. Socially oriented organizations described as pro-state were a stand-alone group of Tatarstan's NGOs that constituted a significant proportion of all of Tatarstan's CSOs. Albeit formally independent, they were created top-down by the governmental agencies to outsource service delivery and maintain

control over the most important (in the view of the authorities) groups of the population. The qualitative distinction between the pro-state and other socially oriented organizations was in the inability of pro-state NGOs to make independent decisions. Even within their mandate, pro-state organizations had to consult with the respective ministries on strategic issues. The majority of study participants believed that these organizations could not play any positive role in political transformation or governance.

In practice, the study participants had different political views within each of the sub-sectors. Their political views did not always reflect whether their CSOs had political or socially oriented functions. While the study participants from the political organizations were generally against Putin's regime, they had very different ideas about Russia's political future. Some of the socially oriented study participants, who commented on their political views, actively supported the current political administration and some did not. The independent participants also shared a whole range of political views. Although the relationship with the government was a divisive factor for the CSOs, it did not necessarily reflect the study participants' political preferences.

Disagreements within the civil society sector. Socially oriented activists felt alienated from the political spectrum of civil society. They believed that political organizations were not offering practical solutions to the daily problems that people in Tatarstan were facing. Socially oriented activists were skeptical of including any political ideology into their projects considering their concerns with access to government funding. None of the socially oriented study participants, however, mentioned any concern with their personal safety as an obstacle for cooperating with political activists, arguing that despite pursuing apolitical causes, all activists were on the government radar. Rather, socially oriented activists were reluctant to side with political organizations and activists as they disagreed with the goals of these organizations.

Both socially oriented and independent activists pointed out that they did not subscribe to any of the existing political opposition parties and social movements, as they did not offer sustainable alternatives to the current political regime. Nevertheless, socially oriented organizations (with the exception of the pro-state organizations) and independent activists declared their openness to cooperation with other segments of civil society on tactical matters, as long as they did not have to abide by any political ideology. As a result, cooperation was limited to a few events and excluded any attempts to work out a joint strategy.

Informal civil society groups. Independent civil society groups were the new distinct type of civil society activism in Tatarstan. During the past years, the expansion of government control over the civil society sector had stimulated the rise of independent activism in Tatarstan. Although independent groups operating in Tatarstan had gathered spontaneously before (for example, the protests against paid fishing in 2011), their activism peaked in 2017.

The unregistered civil society groups and social movements were the most flexible, yet the most vulnerable part of Tatarstan's civil society model. Most independent groups appeared in Tatarstan over the past ten years and more recently as a subtle critique of the formalized models of civil society. The research participants argued for the benefits of not belonging to a formal NGO. They suggested that independent groups had better chances of succeeding in the current political and economic environment. Independent groups and social movements had fewer limitations in their decision-making than formal NGOs, and they did not rely on government funding. On the negative side, independent activists often lacked resources and leverage to impact government decisions.

The emergence of the independent groups in Tatarstan revealed the civil society's active search for new ways to engage people around the most important issues. The study participants

argued that more Tatarstan citizens identified with projects that independent activists supported than with the political CSOs. Independent activism became a prominent component of Tatarstan's civil society sector because of its concentration on localized issues rather than attempting comprehensive political transformation. Similar to the socially oriented organizations, independent activists avoided politicizing their agenda.

Civil society's transformation. Depending on the sector they represented, civil society activists had different approaches to civil society development. Although they contended that Tatarstan's civil society had transformed significantly since the early 1990s, they did not agree about whether this transformation had negative or positive consequences. These differences can be explained by contrasting and divergent understandings of civil society by political and socially oriented activists, where the former prioritized the advocacy function and the latter valued the service provision. Political activists believed that what was once a powerful instrument impacting regional and even federal politics, Tatarstan's civil society was pushed to the margins of the public sphere. There existed fewer opportunities for CSOs to pursue a political or human rights agenda, and each new government decision narrowed those opportunities further. Conversely, many socially oriented activists argued that the civil society of the 1990s was weak, unregulated and could not serve its clients. They articulated that the political reforms following the collapse of the Soviet Union were short of democratization both by design and results. Although political liberalization opened up new opportunities for civil society, economic liberalization leading to extreme poverty overpowered the positive outcomes of political reforms.

The distinct assessment of the past impacted the strategies of civil society activists belonging to different civil society realms. In their attempt to prevent Tatarstan sliding back into the "chaos" of the 1990s, socially oriented activists unintentionally contributed to upholding the

current structures by remaining apolitical. Political activists ignored the economic setbacks of the post-Communist reforms and believed that developing democratic institutions could resolve the problems of Russian civil society.

 The respondents rarely commented on the transformation of civil society from 2000 to 2014, besides referring to the 2011-2012 protests as the culmination of protest activity in Russia. Political activists described this period as a gradual tightening of the public sphere, while several socially oriented research participants referred to this time as prosperous years for their organizations.

Between 2016 and 2017, Tatarstan's civil society experienced several transformative changes. Political organizations were considerably restrained by new federal and regional legislation. Socially oriented organizations faced the consequences of the economic crisis, which reduced funding opportunities. Tatarstan's civil society also experienced an increasing level of pressure from the federal government, which resulted in creating more constraints for nationalist organizations previously tamed by the regional elite. The emergence of independent groups was connected to the decreasing autonomy of the regional government and the economic and social challenges stimulated by the economic crisis.

Regional characteristics. The study participants pointed to the specifics of Tatarstan's CSOs. In some respects, Tatarstan's civil society was similar to other Russian regions. Unlike Moscow and St. Petersburg, political organizations in the regions, including Tatarstan, experienced more pressure and had fewer opportunities to protest. Popular support for their activities was also lower. Nevertheless, in contrast to other non-capital regions, Tatarstan's socially oriented organizations were more viable. There were over 5,000 NGOs registered in Tatarstan, and although the number of registered NGOs did not speak to their quality, several

dozens of these organizations demonstrated high levels of commitment and efficiency in serving their clients.

Effective socially oriented organizations and groups in Tatarstan shared some common features. All of these organizations worked in close collaboration with the government. The research participants shared different perspectives with me about how their affiliation with the regional government impacted the shape of the civil society sector. Some believed that collaboration was key to the organizations' ability to serve clients whereas others thought it led to an overreliance on government funding. In connection to the CSOs' government dependency, several research participants also demonstrated concerns over civil society's sustainability. Successful groups and organizations focused on several issues, most prominently on environmental protection. All of the study participants expressed their support for environmental initiatives. Thus, the environment remained the topic that bridged the divide between political, socially oriented, and independent organizations.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the complexity of the local understanding of Tatarstan's civil society. The shape of Tatarstan's civil society sector reflects its political and historical development, which has also impacted both contesting definitions of civil society activists as a *grazhdanskii activist* and an *obshchestvennik*. Local definitions illustrate the division of the civil society sector into political, socially oriented, and, most recently, independent civil society groups and organizations. These groups and organizations remain largely disconnected on a strategic level, collaborating only on minor issues. The division between different civil society groups leaves them vulnerable to government pressure and prevents them from designing a joint

strategy. The next chapter explores the issues related to the relations between civil society

activists in Tatarstan and the state, and the specific methods authorities have employed to

regulate the civil society sector.

Chapter 6

Tatarstan's state – civil society relations

Introduction

The relations between the state and Tatarstan's civil society are central to understanding the role of CSOs in the governing process. To operate effectively, civil society needs meaningful engagement with the public sector. In Tatarstan's politically restricted environment, however, civil society often lacks institutional mechanisms because it is forced to develop innovative tools for communication with the government. In their attempts to connect with regional authorities, Tatarstan's civil society activists encountered various obstacles and demonstrated creativity in overcoming them.

This chapter focuses on Tatarstan's state – civil society relations through the eyes and experiences of the civil society activists. Lederach (2016) notes that all levels of society are important for transformation. To effectively connect the grassroots and decision-making levels, civil society needs to establish credible relations with them (Lederach, 1997). By working together with other sectors, particularly the government, civil society can increase its policy capacity (Levasseur, 2014) and support local ownership of decision-making (Schirch, 2016). Aware of the need for cross-sectoral collaboration, my research participants confirmed the necessity of working closely with the government to advance civil society. Nevertheless, they were largely pessimistic about the levels of such cooperation in Tatarstan. Although the conflicts between civil society and the state are not necessarily negative and can create opportunities to improve state – civil society relations (Kjellman & Harpviken, 2010), the critical power asymmetry in state – civil society relations undermined the advocacy role of Tatarstan's civil society sector and limited its capacity to impact governance.

The following themes emerged from the study participants' discussion of state – civil society relations: (1) formal instruments of communication between civil society activists and the government, (2) the government's non-coercive strategies that it used to channel civic activity, and (3) enforcement mechanisms that were applied by the government against Tatarstan's civic activists.

These themes emerged from the interviews with the research participants who were asked to describe their relations with the government. In particular, the research participants were encouraged to elaborate on their channels of communication with government offices and the instruments authorities used to regulate civil society. Moreover, the government was mentioned in response to many other interview questions, more commonly than any other actor. When responding to the questions, the research participants also shared their understandings of good governance (discussed in detail in Chapter 8) together with civil society activists' visions of the future.

Mechanisms of communication

Sustainable mechanisms of communication between the state and civil society determine the effectiveness of their cooperation to a great extent. In addition to consistency of communication, civil society has to co-design cooperation frameworks to guarantee their fairness and establish credible accountability mechanisms (Levasseur, 2018a; MacDonald & Levasseur, 2014; Phillips & Levasseur, 2004). These communication mechanisms in Russia are state-initiated and mostly consultative, so that they may potentially serve as a space for collaboration[34] (Richter, 2009; Robertson, 2009, 2011; Stuvøy, 2014). In the Russian regions, the level of

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[34] At the same time, these authors acknowledge that consultation is the least desirable form of collaboration, where the state has the power to control the process and outcomes of such collaboration.

cooperation between the state and civil society varies (Gel'man, 2010; Toepler, Pape, & Benevolenski, 2019).

Regardless of their affiliation, the research participants indicated that the relationships between Tatarstan's CSOs and the state were unequal. The status of an organization often depended on the level of its compliance with the rules set by the government. Semyon reported that, "The state offers its own rules of the game, and if civic activists want to play by these rules, then yes [they are fine], and if they don't, then they somehow oppose the state and then they experience different problems."

The willingness of regional and federal governments to cooperate with Tatarstan's civic activists was reflected in the means of communication available to them. The research participants named several communication mechanisms, namely writing letters and petitions to government offices, approaching local and federal government officials personally, the system of people's monitoring, the Public Chamber of Tatarstan, and federal bodies, such as the All Russian People's Front.

All of the research participants named official letters and petitions as their main instruments of communication with the governmental offices. Activists regularly sent their requests in written form to ensure attention to their appeals. The respondents contended that government officials used generic responses to their petitions, and the substance of the appeals was frequently unaddressed. This generic response is called *otpiska* – a reply as a formality. *Otpiskas* were advanced by the Soviet bureaucracy and remain the most popular government reaction to citizens' letters in modern Russia. Often, *otpiskas* refer petitioners to a different government agency or declare that a petition has been forwarded to a different jurisdiction. The game of transferring letters and petitions from one governmental agency to another is called

otfutbolit' – to pass a ball or play football. By *playing football* different ministries can profess

that the appeal is not under their jurisdiction and pass it on.

All of the research participants shared experiences of how their petitions were passed

around various ministries regularly boomeranging to the initial authority. In the case of the

incineration plant, the activists had first approached the Ministry of Health Care, arguing that the

construction of the plant was a public health issue. The Ministry of Health Care referred them to

the Ministry of Environment, which then passed the ball to the Ministry of Construction. The

latter, obviously, had no jurisdiction over public health issues and could not respond to the

substance of the petition. The impunity of government officials and the widespread corruption

were the main reasons for the practices of *otpiskas* and *playing football*. Alfia had the following

to say on the issue:

ALFIA: Here, in the Republic of Tatarstan, there is no use in complaining about

arbitrariness because we have Shaimiev's [the first president of Tatarstan] relatives

[everywhere] …. We get *otpiskas* for all our petitions …. No matter how high you aim,

our [petitions] all go down [to the lower level agencies] that don't conduct any inquiries.

I have tons of such petitions at home!

Another research participant – Karina – sarcastically called *otpiskas* and *playing football*

the "beautiful instruments" of Russian bureaucracy she would have prayed for if she were a

government official. She explained that these instruments assist the government in containing

protest activity. As their petitions traveled around the various ministries, a lot of activists gave up

on their cause. In addition, the pro-government organizations were also not immune to these

government tactics. Typically, they faced *otpiskas* and *football* when requesting funding not directly related to projects, such as office space.

Considering that the written communication was often ineffective, activists preferred meeting with government officials in person. However, not all civil society activists were invited to official meetings to avoid unexpected outcomes. In particular, independent and political activists claimed that the official meetings were futile because their purpose was to pacify the public and demonstrate that the authorities were already dealing with the problem. If these activists were eventually admitted to a meeting with a minister, they could not share their opinion with him or her. For instance, Ivan asserted that at public hearings and meetings, government officials always tried to convince activists about the righteousness of the state position instead of paying attention to the activists' arguments.

The respondents contended that the only "working mechanism" that demonstrated an immediate effect was when activists approached the top leaders of the republic or federation. Deliberating about the mechanisms of communication that had shown some effect, Maxim argued that the only effective tool to communicate with Tatarstan's government should be called "acquaintances." In other words, activists needed to develop personal relations with the decisionmakers to get positive results. Fanis noted that the good knowledge of the establishment guaranteed that civil society activists made contacts with the officials that "would listen" to them.

Other activists also claimed that communicating with "reasonable" bureaucrats was the most efficient practice of Tatarstan's state – civil society cooperation. At the same time, the majority of those bureaucrats and parliament members could not make independent decisions within the corrupt system. Ivan reported that, "Talking with the parliament members makes no

difference, because, ok, we have talked with one, but he's only one of the hundred parliament members, he makes no decisions, he makes no impact."

Hence, the only remaining option left to activists is to contact the top leadership, namely president Minnikhanov. Egor explained the situation in the following manner:

EGOR: The mechanism that has been invented specifically in our conditions, if the first person is making all the decisions, then we need to find an activist or a statesperson, who is close to the first person [and is capable] to get through to him. What else can you do? … The mechanism is found, let's use it at least in Tatarstan … before we get through to a senior official who would [be willing to] investigate the situation, the situation cannot be fixed.

The interviewees pointed out the systemic challenges they were not capable of overcoming. Lilia argued that, "There are some good people, conscientious good [people]. But as a system?" Lilia asked a rhetoric question, suggesting that structural limitations were blocking civil society's communication with the government. The existing communication system depended exclusively on the human qualities of a specific official, yet it was by no means a safe and sustainable tool. While top officials decided to meet and listen to some civic activists, they ignored the rest.

Under pressure, top officials including the President of Tatarstan made promises, which they later ignored, and the activists had no mechanisms to hold them accountable. According to the interviewees, silencing activists was the most common government strategy in relation to apolitical civil society, such as environmental or HIV prevention groups and organizations. The

activists asserted that they had initially taken the government officials' promises seriously but soon realized that they were made to distract their attention. As Alfia pointed out, "Everything ends with the talks like 'yes, yes, we'll look into it, yes'. And every year, each year, we have the same problems."

As a result, civic activists faced the dilemma of whether to collaborate with the officials and hope that some of their appeals would be heard or to take a principled stance. Dinar explained why he and his group had chosen to turn down the authorities' offers:

DINAR: They had invited us to collaboration, [they] said that they were interested in having a constructive dialogue. But it was obvious that the constructive dialogue [for them] was [us] telling them what was wrong, yet not criticizing them publicly. In other words, the constructive dialogue was giving them feedback but not escalating the situation publicly. But we refused this [offer] right away.

Unable to communicate effectively with Tatarstan's officials, civil society activists sometimes tried to approach federal leaders, preferably Vladimir Putin himself. The activists who did not belong to any formal organization usually chose this emergency plan. For instance, Lilia argued that finding common ground with the federal institutions and officials was easier as "they were not involved in our small feuds." Similarly, Ivan found greater support in Moscow than in Tatarstan. Socially oriented NGO representatives, however, found that contacting federal officials behind the regional authorities back was too risky, and political activists rejected communication with both regional and federal officials.

Political and independent activists were overall discontented with their relations with the

government. Nevertheless, they named conflict resolution instruments that proved to be more

useful than the others. One was the system of people's monitoring₃₅, which allowed people to

report violations and receive a quick response from the respective agencies. It proved to be

useful on the level of small-scale neighbourhood initiatives when the problems could be easily

addressed. As Dinar noted, the willingness to cooperate on these smaller issues was an easy way

to demonstrate the government's efficiency and desire to have a constructive dialogue. People's

monitoring was also a system of direct citizens' involvement, which bypassed CSOs, and

minimized the need for the government to negotiate with the activists. The people's monitoring

system is different from public monitoring commissions that invite civil society activists to

oversee the conditions in the penitentiary system (Owen, 2015). Several participants mentioned

that the latter as an initial effective tool for improving prison conditions. More recently,

however, Tatarstan's public monitoring commissions were inadequate because of increased

supervision by the authorities.

There have also been several overarching arrangements made for state – civil society

interaction including the All-Russia People's Front₃₆ on the federal level, and public chambers

on both federal and regional levels. Since 2005, public chambers were responsible for

supervising federal and state relations with CSOs and for advising the state on social issues

(Henderson, 2011). The Public Chamber is particularly active in managing Tatarstan's civil

society sector.

The research participants had mixed feelings about these developments. On the one hand,

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₃₅ The system of people's monitoring was established in Russia to regulate the involvement of citizens in overseeing the delivery of public services. In Tatarstan, it includes a government-managed website, where the citizens can report various violations, ranging from corrupt government officials to improper road maintenance.
₃₆ The All-Russia People's Front was officially introduced in 2011 by then-Prime Minister Putin to provide new ideas to the ruling party – United Russia. Its supporters consider it to be an instrument for collaboration between the state and civil society, the critics – as a mechanism of co-optation.

the Public Chamber brought together people with extensive experience in the nonprofit sector and, thus, had great potential to generate new ideas for its development. The Public Chamber provided activists with an opportunity to communicate their ideas to the government and incorporate these ideas into policies. Alfia suggested that, "The government, they don't know about the problem. Nothing at all …. Only the people who are working there [in the field] know all the pros and cons [of a specific policy]." Rezeda, who worked closely with the Public Chamber, believed that this institution provided an opportunity for CSOs to collaborate on joint projects. She asserted the following in her story:

> REZEDA: The benefit of the [Public] Chamber is that it serves as a negotiation forum between the authorities and the representatives of civil society … when the consolidated opinion [of civil society] arrives at the government or Duma, they will listen to it more attentively than when one small NGO knocks on their door.

Activists admitted that the Public Chamber was a useful tool that provided leverage to their organizations, which otherwise had little authority over public institutions. Ibrahim, an activist working with former offenders, believed that membership in the Public Chamber granted his organization the authority to negotiate with the government. Similarly, Karim, who represented an organization working in HIV prevention, argued that his affiliation with the Public Chamber was somewhat useful and was particularly advantageous outside of the capital city. In Kazan, however, the Public Chamber served as an excuse for government officials to ignore civic activists. Karim reported that, "They have taken a comfortable position. There is a sort of civil society, here, in Kremlin [because] we have the Public Chamber, and that's enough."

On the other hand, activists pointed out that the civil society representatives loyal to the regime to a great extent formed the Public Chamber. According to its by-laws, the new Chamber members have to be approved by the President of Tatarstan, Tatarstan's Parliament (*Gosudarstvennii Sovet*) and by current Public Chamber members. Each of these institutions selects 1/3 of the members (20 out of 60). At least half of the members rotate every election term (3 years). Ivan commented that this composition of the Public Chamber raised concerns among activists because civil society activists comprise only one third of the Chamber. Ivan noted that, "We cannot expect that there will be people in the Public Chamber that would help us and would represent our interests because 40 out of 60 [people there] are the president's representatives."

The representatives of the pro-state organizations had a more positive view about their relations with the government. They believed that inviting civic activists to join government agencies strengthened the civil society agenda and allowed the experts from the nonprofit sector to impact government policies. The *pro-state* activists also suggested that the creation of top-down structures, such as the House of Friendship between peoples[37] was instrumental to the government's cooperation with CSOs. Overall, their collaboration with the government paid off by providing CSOs opportunities to contribute to policymaking. The *pro-state* activists highlighted the necessity of the government having control in specialized spheres, such as with youth and immigrants. They named their bilateral agreements with the respective ministries among the main mechanisms of state – civil society cooperation, which they believed to be more effective than the ad hoc mechanisms other organizations used. A pro-government activist named Ilsiyar noted that, "We have plans … signed by one minister and by another minister. That's it, if there's a plan agreed upon by all the parties … who can refuse anything to us?"

[37] The House of Friendship between peoples is a government-supported organization that supervises Tatarstan's interethnic relations.

In addition to these agreements, pro-state activists saw the Public Chamber as a platform for collaboration because it ensured that CSOs did not duplicate each other's efforts and that they shared their best practices. Marina described the usual process of cooperation between her organization and a ministry as follows:

> MARINA: It's a dialogue, the fact that [we] can tell them what's important for us … and they tell [us what] they need … we try to find a mutually acceptable solution, which would be acceptable both for us and for them. And I think that this [form of cooperation] is beneficial [for our organization] because a [private] sponsor would've passed down his own goals … it's more effective [to collaborate with the government] because we support each other.

Ultimately, most of the respondents noted that neither of the existing mechanisms was effective enough. The government reacted to civil society initiatives only when activists were perceived as a threat. To minimize this threat, formal consultations with the public helped to distract attention from the most critical issues. For instance, activists successfully advocated for the design of a new park as a substitute for mass construction in a Kazan neighbourhood. However, Ilshat reported that when the activists were invited to public hearings, they could not propose their own concept of the park and instead they were "consulted" about the details, like the shapes of the trails.

In general, all but the pro-state activists shared resentment about their communication with the Tatarstan government. Karim summarized it in the following way:

KARIM: In our interaction with the government … we first had a conflict, then sort of [gained] respect, then we got used to each other … and now they don't take us seriously … they realized that actually, we don't have any enforcement mechanisms, that everything is locked up tight in the state, and you can't do anything about it.

The research participants agreed that the disregard for civil society initiatives caused more damage than any other government constraint. Both political and socially oriented organizations experienced the government's neglect of their initiatives. As one political activist, Grigory, noticed, "In Tatarstan, no one really hurts us, but no one listens to us either." Meanwhile, the research participants saw the development of equal partnerships with the government as the key to civil society's success. For their part, civic activists tried out all possible tools of cooperation following the rules and regulations, despite their opposition to some of them. Vadim, a political activist, noted that, "Of course, we can't do without cooperation with the government … we are always on the side of the law. We always act within the legal framework. We never carry out illegal actions."

Socially oriented activists asserted that they always tried to be respectful to their colleagues in government offices and to resolve conflicts when it was possible. For instance, although his organization had experienced neglect and pressure from the government, Karim preferred having partner relations with the authorities and sought other mechanisms only when local officials did not address the problem.

The members of predominantly pro-state organizations claimed that they mitigated conflicts and minimized critique from their colleagues. They expressed loyalty to the authorities to retain the benefits of cooperation. The majority of activists, however, did not see cooperation

with the government and the critique of its policies as mutually exclusive. They believed that government dependency, including funding, was counterproductive. Rather, CSOs and activists needed to develop working mechanisms to influence government decisions about issues surrounding their competence. Ilshat argued that, "The state has to cooperate with civil society. Civil society is not against the state, it just tries to do certain things, which the state overlooks for some reasons."

The study participants believed that the government had to make that next move towards civil society as the activists had exhausted all possible means to cooperate with them. However, the government's interests were different from those of the civil society sector. Alfia stressed that, "Ideally, our interests would coincide in something. Well, now they don't."

Mechanisms of co-optation

Reshaping civil society for the benefit of the state has been a part of authoritarian policies under Putin's regime since the early 2000s (Robertson, 2009). The 2011-2012 protests have significantly impacted the relations between the state and civil society in Russia. The government initiated some mechanisms to develop civil society spaces and structures that were compliant or at least neutral to state policies (Hemment, 2012; Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013). At the same time, Cheskin and March (2015) argue that "the balance between co-option, control and contention varies over space, social sector and time" (p. 257), suggesting that the Russian government encourages a certain level of contention within government controlled frameworks. Despite the enforcement mechanisms available to them, Tatarstan's authorities also preferred to mitigate most conflicts with civil society by using non-coercive means. They used a vast array of tools to control CSOs, such as channeling their funding, hiring activists to work in

government offices, and appropriating the successes of CSOs.

Financial instruments remain one of the most powerful apparatuses to control civil society. During the 2000s, Tatarstan was one of the most self-sufficient regions of the Russian Federation (Nizamova, 2016), which allowed the republic to accumulate financial resources and support loyal CSOs. Government regional funding promoted civil society sector growth. Today, funding and other forms of government support effectively channel Tatarstan's civic activity in the directions defined by the government. The assessment of the funding opportunities by the research participants varied depending on their target group and their relations with the authorities. The pro-state organizations' outlook on the funding opportunities deviated from other civil society groups. The regional ministries directly financed these organizations, after signing bilateral agreements with them. The pro-government organizations also qualified for many federal and regional grants, as their mandates were relatable to government priorities, in particular, to the spheres of youth and immigration policies.

Most of the research participants confirmed that government funding was "targeted" to allocate money to certain social issues. As a result, CSOs that were less accommodative of government priorities rarely complied with the regional grants eligibility criteria. Although these socially oriented CSOs occasionally won regional or federal grants, they received minimal sums of money. For instance, Nikolay shared his experience of the non-transparent grant allocation policy. His organization was never notified when it failed the government's grant application. Nikolay raised his concerns at the Public Chamber, and did not receive any coherent answer. Nikolay contended that, "I had a feeling that only those organizations that are close to the leadership win."

The "foreign agent" law has further impacted the shape of the civil society sector by

forbidding Russian NGOs to receive foreign funding (Reichert, 2015). In Tatarstan, this legislation cut many CSOs off of their primary funding sources, in particular, the NGOs working in HIV prevention. The study participants also argued that regional funding had recently decreased owing to the economic crisis. Egor pointed out that the impact of this change on the future of Tatarstan's civil society was still unclear:

> EGOR: Being a fairly rich republic, Tatarstan now can't spend the money internally, [which] directly impacts the development of civil society. So, the model when the state controls everything, yet gives money to, for example, NGOs and other civil society structures is becoming history …. [When] there is no money, civil society organizations' activity becomes short-lived … because they simply cannot finance simple things …. As demonstrated by practice, the republic is not giving too much, the federal center gives funny [sums of money] … like 30 000 rubles [less then 500 $].

Civil society activists searched for alternative funding sources and experienced a different level of success. Socially oriented activists approached businesses and experimented with various social entrepreneurship ideas while political organizations benefitted from crowd funding. Independent activists mostly operated through receiving small personal donations. Nonetheless, for many socially oriented organizations not having access to government grants and international funding remained an obstacle to their sustainability and effectiveness.

It was therefore not surprising that highly qualified but underpaid (or often unpaid) civic activists had to quit. Despite their commitment to their organization or cause, restrictive funding conditions forced many civil society activists to reconsider their relations with the government.

Pro-government organizational activists used their civil society experience to apply for government positions. Civil society activists without a political agenda were sometimes offered government offices. Several interviewees shared the story of a former activist who was invited to be an advisor to the President. The activist was concerned with the degrading urban environment and the demolition of buildings in Kazan's historic downtown. Without much hope of receiving a response, she wrote to president Minnikhanov inviting him to her city tour and promising to show the historic buildings that required conservation. Unexpectedly, Minnikhanov attended the tour and continued regularly inspecting downtown Kazan. Shortly thereafter, the activist was invited to be his advisor.

Activists had mixed feelings about this appointment. On the one hand, they pointed out that if the activist had not joined the administration, many heritage buildings would have been lost completely. Using her connections, she managed to save some important buildings in Kazan and served as a connection between civic activists and the government. On the other hand, activists noted that it was a short-term success. Dinar asserted that, "I admire … [her], we have friendly relations anyway, but on the other hand, I don't know how to interpret this story … I don't condemn her decision to become President's advisor … [but] I think, the city protection movement has immediately become less mobilized."

If activists accept similar offers, they will never initiate any radical transformation of the system. Their background was, of course, carefully checked to ensure loyalty. Moreover, a few well-intentioned activists within the government structures could not transform the system from within and had to adjust to the system to be able to deliver to their CSO comrades and local constituents. Egor noted that, "If you work for the state, perhaps, it's just impossible … to ignore the state agenda. They will just appoint another person, who would comply because acting

differently is impossible. Hence, I think condemning someone personally is impossible … it's the system."

Another way of integrating the government agenda into the work of civil society was to sponsor organizations working on similar issues as the existing independent organizations. For example, instead of the government promoting bottom-up nationalist organizations, a new state-inspired House of Friendship between peoples was established in Kazan to bring together organizations representing different ethnic groups. As Ilya noted, those "parallel and loyal to the authorities' groups" were financially incentivized to remain within the agreed framework. They also succeeded in recruiting support for their events and activities among their target groups, not least because they enjoyed government support.

Whether there was a formal agreement between a certain ministry and a civil society group or not, government officials did not hesitate to put their name on the achievements of civic activists. Fanis recalled his experience of the republic's administration appropriating civil society work as follows:

> FANIS: The Tom Sawyer fest is a good example … at Glubokoe lake, the local divers
> have cleaned it and built a dock at their own expense, everything [was] really high-
> quality. After that, some sort of minister came … and staged something with balloons as
> if the minister has opened a dock here.

CSOs in Tatarstan were often coopted into the government structures due to the asymmetrical power relations they had with local authorities. When an organization, or more often, when an independent movement gained enough popular support to oppose government

policies, local politicians often tried to pacify the movement by offering funding or office space to its leaders. Despite the corrupt nature of this behaviour, some civil society activists believed that it could be used at least temporarily due to the lack of better options.

Mechanisms of enforcement

Political protests and social movements activities continue across Russia (Gabowitsch, 2016), yet most of the opposition in Russia has been pushed to the margins of political life largely by the new legislation (Gel'man, 2015; Turovsky, 2010). Although the government has favored co-optation strategies, repression is also used against the opposition (Turovsky, 2014). On top of the soft regulatory mechanisms, the Russian government and Tatarstan regional authorities have increased the measures to restrict the civil society sector. These measures predominantly included enforcing legislation, arrests and the criminal prosecution of activists. Although political activists were impacted the most by these measures, the majority of research participants had also experienced some government repressive measures doing their activities. The respondents representing the pro-state organizations stayed away from discussing government enforcement measures and represented a special case, which is discussed later in this chapter.

To function effectively, the civil society sector needs laws that would ensure its accountability and transparency. However, Tatarstan's civil society sector is increasingly over-regulated, making civic activists feel that the state is hindering the positive development of civil society. The research participants believed that creating additional instruments was unnecessary and confusing for civic activists. Thus, Anna asserted that the state's bureaucracy and the law overwhelm NGOs:

ANNA: The legal framework for the NGOs and small business is running through the roof! It has been developed on the federal level and cannot be transformed. Whereas they [NGOs and small businesses] are usually working in their narrow field, they don't need to know that much, they need some support.

From the point of view of the Russian state, these excessive regulations are necessary to avoid any unpredictable results stemming from civic activism. The regime has guaranteed stability by placing civil society within a rigid legal framework so that bureaucrats can take legally appropriate measures against the violators. Semyon sarcastically noted the following in his narrative:

SEMYON: They [the government] believe that by limiting everything they'll make everything fine. If we haven't regulated something, we'll just make another law on this topic so that there won't be any trouble … And this [activity] brings them certain results, in other words, in the point of view of the state these [regulations] demonstrate its effectiveness.

Most importantly, there were already instruments in place that could provide both a legal and an institutional framework to regulate the civil society sector. In the early 1990s the legal regulation of the nonprofit sector was lacking, and in 1996 the Federal law on nonprofit organizations was adopted. Similarly, there were institutions in place to ensure that these regulations were observed. The research participants pointed out that if these instruments worked

effectively there would be no need to create additional mechanisms. This is what Ilshat had to say on the issue:

> ILSHAT: The State Duma [stopped] being a place for discussions, let's open a Public Chamber and discuss there. So, the Prosecutor's office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs aren't working properly, let's create the Ombudsmen office … these are all absolutely unnecessary structures in the normal society with the government bodies that function. But because they [the Russian government bodies] do not function, the [new] organs are created, which have no authority. Take the Ombudsmen's office. They can't do anything!

The research participants pointed out two new legal mechanisms that have negatively impacted their activity. The "law on foreign agents" harmed both political and socially oriented organizations, in particular, those in need of foreign funding. The amendments to the federal law on nonprofit organizations are nicknamed the "law on foreign agents" as they restrict the funding of Russian nonprofit organizations by foreign organizations and individuals (a.k.a. "foreign agents"). The new regulations require nonprofit organizations, which receive foreign funding, to register with the government (Reichert, 2015).

After the success of the colour revolutions in several post-Soviet countries, political organizations (including human rights organizations) were primarily targeted under the "law on foreign agents" to eliminate foreign support to the political opposition. However, even if an organization is not affiliated with any political cause, it is still at risk of being identified as "a foreign agent."

In particular, the study participants suggested that many academic or research organizations that receive foreign grants are facing government censure over foreign funding. CSOs are in the most difficult situation if they cannot sustain themselves without foreign funding. On the one hand, Russian foundations and government agencies are not interested in investing in their projects. On the other hand, fundraising could possibly cover some of the costs of their projects. Therefore, they have little choice but to receive foreign funding at their own risk. Among others, organizations working with HIV positive clients got caught in this crossfire. Government agencies did not provide them with sufficient funding, whereas their foreign donors, including UN agencies, became subjects to the "law on foreign agents." Activists pointed out that all of the organizations working on "unpopular" issues had to seek funding outside of Russia. Alfia noted that, some organizations ended up getting on the "foreign agent list." She argued that, "There is no way to know [who will get accused], [we] can only wait who gets caught .... Essentially, everyone uses the same program, everyone uses the same methods [of HIV prevention]. Hence, tomorrow we could be declared "foreign agents."

Another piece of legislation that put significant limitations on Tatarstan's civil society is the so-called "rally law." This nickname was given to both amendments to the Federal law "On Meetings, Rallies, Demonstrations, Marches and Pickets," and the complementary regional legislation. After the 2011-2012 protests at Bolotnaya square, the amendments to the federal law were adopted. The amendments created harsher punishments for the unsanctioned protests, increasing fines from 5,000 to 300,000 rubles for rallying participants and up to 600,000 rubles for the organizers. Moreover, peaceful protesters could now face detention and criminal charges for continuous violations of this law. From now on, any public meeting of two or more persons standing within a specific distance could be classified as a political action (Federalnii zakon o

sobraniiakh, 2004). Amnesty International regarded these amendments as "legalizing human rights violations" (Amnesty International, 2015). Tatarstan's activists called the new regulations absurd allowing the authorities to persecute organizers and participants involved in any public gathering. In particular, Tatarstan's political activists agreed with the AI's assessment of the "rally law" and called this piece of legislation anti-constitutional. For instance, Marat asserted that, "Being a lawyer, I am, of course, concerned with the denial of constitutional rights [and] with the fact that people cannot go out to a rally, a picket, a demonstration …. After pickets [and] rallies people get arrested [or] fined…. People cannot express their opinion ...."

Although the federal government has led the way in tightening the power of the authoritarian regime in Russia, Tatarstan has pioneered a stricter course of action (Mikhailov, 2010). The respondents (political and independent) believed that Tatarstan's regional authorities had surpassed the federal government in their desire to legally restrain civil society by developing harsher regional legislation against CSO rallies. Thus, Vadim pointed out that the new legislation was a breach of the Russian constitution and violated the human rights proclaimed in it:

VADIM: They [Tatarstan authorities] have adopted a law that violates the federal law … [and] the federal law violates the constitution. Our FZ [federal law] on rallies contradicts article 31 [of the constitution, which guarantees the right to peaceful assembly]. The republican law on rallies contradicts even this FZ, not to mention the constitution.

The laws limiting public assembly harmed the political CSOs, yet independent activists were also seriously affected. Independent activists avoided collaborating with political

organizations and being labeled "foreign agents" because they were aware of the anti-opposition nature of the new legislation. Ivan explained why his movement has not encouraged the political opposition to participate in his independent group rallies. He noted that, "If there are political opposition participating, the cause is lost. [The government would say] that most likely the [U.S.] State Department has paid for everything." However, the apolitical rallies did not always receive government approval either. Ivan articulated that the "rally law" limited activists, particularly environmentalists, from holding their protests in the easily accessible public spaces. This is what he had to say on the issue:

> IVAN: We've been having difficulties since March [2017] when they decided to change the [regional] law on rallies. When now we have to have rallies behind the fence, get our posters checked and so forth …. Well, all these [regulations] harm civic activity and don't ensure our civil right for assembly.

Tatarstan's socially oriented organizations and independent movements highlighted their apolitical stance recognizing that the law could be used against them. In addition, activists were concerned that other criminal charges could be fabricated against their organizations for using the tactics of nonviolent resistance. Ivan reported on this issue in the following manner:

> IVAN: Anyone protecting their rights, ecological or others, could be then called an ecological extremist, right? That's how they call it – ecological extremism, and this is already a serious charge – extremism! And what do they [the government] suggest? To tighten control over nonprofit organizations, right? To counter ecological extremism ….

So, protecting the rights of citizens is an anti-national activity!

The repressive legal framework made it almost impossible for civic activists to avoid breaking the law. Ultimately, it was not a question of whether they followed all the legal norms but whether they posed a danger to the local elite and their business interests. Under these circumstances, civic activists considered that breaking some legal norms was unavoidable. Egor noted it in the following way:

> EGOR: Maybe they even break the law at times, cross some lines, but that's because there is no cooperation with the government on where it is the [civil society] field and where it is the legal system in which the government acts, often, by using force.

Eventually, civil society activists had to determine their own attitude to the legal framework on an individual basis. Some followed all the regulations others violated them to remain true to the cause, and some tried to use the same legal framework to advocate for their own benefit and interests. Lilia contended that the protection of the environment was not merely a right but also the citizens' duty to defend:

> LILIA: We call them security rights when the state fails to protect its own laws. I think we even have an article of the [Criminal code according to which] if you witness a crime being committed, you have to report to the police and, whenever possible, to hold the criminal back until the authorities arrive. Because the authorities were not reacting to the situation, we were holding back the backfilling of the Volga ourselves.

The participants also mentioned several "know-how" measures taken by law enforcement agencies to prevent undesirable protests. First, an activist is detained for several hours and then released without any charges. When the government does not sanction protests, police authorities correctly assume that activists may hold them anyway. Hence, Dinar monitored social media to learn if activists are detained on their way to a picket:

DINAR: We were trying to hold a picket before the [FIFA] Confederations Cup in November last year, and the police detained all the participants preventively for three hours … there was a police operation [and] they were monitoring where we were …. As we exited [our homes], other participants and I were detained by the police immediately.

The "rally law" made the preventive targeting by the police of activists in any public space easy where their activity could be defined by default as a rally. When the Open Russia activists called for people to write and bring letters in person to protest Putin's presidential nomination in April 2017, just lining up to put their letters into a mailbox automatically fell under the definition of a rally. A few dozen people stood quietly in a line to slip their letter into the box held by an Open Russia's activist. Karina recalled that the police were aware of the action and were instructed to take preventive measures and arrest the organizer:

KARINA: A few hours before the action, detention vehicles were roaming around the neighbourhood. In other words, when the authorities approve political actions, they know how they [the actions] will end in advance. They [the actions] usually end up with arrests.

This was an action, which did not require any authorization, nothing. People had no

posters, no banners, no one was saying anything into a microphone. Everyone was

standing in a line, walking closer and dropping an envelope [into the box]. There was an

activist from the Open Russian with her lawyer. The law enforcement officers came …

and asked this girl … to follow them.

Ilya noted that even when rallies were authorized, the authorities still figured out creative

ways to apply the "rally law." He described this issue in the following way:

ILYA: [An activist] was on trial for his speech during an authorized rally. [It's] the

know-how of this year in Tatarstan, [when people] are convicted for authorized rallies

because their speech was off topic. In other words, the theme of the public meeting was,

for example, Tatfondbank bailout, but he [the arrested activist] says that the Tatarstan

government has caused it [the banking crisis] and that the government has to leave, and

this [the activist's speech] is off the theme.

The majority of the political activists were detained for their activism at least once.

Usually, they spent 10 to 15 days in detention for various violations of the "rally law" including

their posts on social media. Recently, the Facebook post inviting everyone to visit the office of a

political organization was interpreted as a call to an unauthorized rally, and an activist posting

this "call" was detained. Tatarstan's political activists reported that they were accustomed to

arbitrary detentions and fines but were anxious to face criminal charges for their activism. Lilia

noted that independent activists were also afraid that criminal cases could be fabricated if they

refused to cooperate with the government:

> LILIA: Any day now, police come. Not necessarily for the protest actions, it's much
>
> worse when they try to frame [activists] for committing a criminal offense or as a witness
>
> [of a criminal offense]. Every time I [become active], I receive a call [from the police]
>
> saying that my car was involved in a hit-and-run.

The study participants recognized that the most concerning element of Tatarstan's repressive governmental system was the absence of the independent judiciary. In addition to the law enforcement agencies acting upon the orders of the ruling elite, judges often supported unlawful decisions of the administration. Marat said that, "If the city administration makes a decision, or when the constitution is violated, or the law is violated … you go the court to challenge it, and the court takes the side of the administration."

The research participants' experiences of court hearings in Tatarstan indicated that they believed that court decisions depended on the personality of a judge. Judges reacted differently to the absurd charges. Activists recalled cases when they laughed together with a judge over the language in the court applications. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases judges were compelled to align with government officials. Similar to other Russian regions, Tatarstan's judges were appointed and were less incentivized to serve the law than they were to serve the administration.

Activists also mentioned a few judicial decisions that went in their favour when they were plaintiffs in lawsuits against corporations. However, there were fewer decisions of this kind and they were usually harder to implement. Even when a judge acted on behalf of activists, the court rulings were often ignored without serious implications for the violators. The research

participants argued that although they did not sue the Tatarstan government directly, they challenged businesses affiliated with the elite. The CEOs of these companies were not afraid to disregard court rulings because they were confident of their patrons' protection.

The drastic power inequality demonstrated itself in the rules and regulations set by the state, which civic activists were unable to fulfill. For instance, the HIV prevention advocates needed approval from a whole list of government agencies to carry out a public event with only five days to get their approval. As the wait time for a response from these agencies was significantly longer, the event was canceled. Formally, the city administration did not prohibit the event but it set infeasible requirements on the CSO. Likewise, political activists did not always have their rallies rejected. The administration deliberately approved a few rallies, while offering the most inconvenient conditions for the rally to take place. As one of the politically oriented activists illustrated, the location for their rally was changed from downtown to an industrial area, from noon to 7 a.m. on a Sunday. Officially, the administration could report that it had approved a certain number of rally applications, although in practice those rallies were difficult to attend for the majority of people.

Finally, even the pro-government organizations experienced inequality in their relations with the state. Although they argued that cooperation with the government provided them with opportunities to better serve their clients, they had to adjust their programs to fit the official agenda better. Marina, who worked in a government sponsored NGO had this to say on the issue:

MARINA: And, among other things, they tell us what to do and which way to go. Well, yes, of course, we may not always like it, or this may not always coincide with our opinion. But we personally try to listen to them, because we understand that this

arrangement for us is effective …. And when you give them any comments … they look down on you [and] don't take you as an equal … I do understand that they are making decisions on the upper levels but in [our] practice we already have working mechanisms and methods, so why re-invent the wheel?

The study participants expressed frustration with government enforcement mechanisms and believed that they were harmful to both sides. When Tatarstan's local government exhausted other available means to restrict unwanted civic activity, most notably political activism, it initiated and enforced anti-constitutional legislation. Civil society activists did not have any means to withstand the government's pressure owing, in particular, to the government-controlled judiciary.

Discussions and findings

Overall, the study participants reported several patterns in their relations with the state: (1) available tools of communication, (2) non-coercive instruments used to channel civic activity, and (3) enforcement mechanisms applied by the government. The following findings have emerged from the discussion of these forms of state – civil society relations in Tatarstan.

Tools of written communication. Communication mechanisms offered potential directions for improving state – civil society relations in Tatarstan, which were possible through several channels. Written letters and petitions were the most widely used tools by all three groups of activists: political, socially oriented and independent. Political activists raised their complaints in the written form. While they had little hope of achieving positive results, they chose to keep a paper trail for potential lawsuits. For independent activists, the institutionalized

forms of communication, such as the Public Chamber, were usually unavailable. Therefore, they wrote letters and petitions, especially during the initial stages of their work. Socially oriented activists used all of the available tools at their disposal, including letters, whereas pro-state organizations used letters preferentially to seek government support.

Petitions and letters were the least expensive method of addressing government agencies directly. Considering their lack of resources, CSOs often preferred letters and petitions to gain accessibility. At the same time, the research participants argued that letters and petitions were rarely effective. Even the pro-state organizations often faced challenges with getting a positive response to their letters. In many instances, government officials used *otpiskas* responding to citizens' appeals, which focused on the form rather than the substance of letters to exhaust petitioners' patience. In addition, government agencies "passed the ball" to other ministries shirking their responsibility to have to adjudicate potentially unfavorable decisions. Each and every research participant had experienced *otpiskas* and *playing football* in their relations with the government of Tatarstan.

Reach for the "first person." Approaching government officials in-person appeared to be the more effective tool of communication with the authorities; however, the use of this channel depended on the access to certain officials and the personal characteristics of the decisionmakers. Independent activists used this type of communication most successfully by working closely with government officials who sympathized with their cause. In general, independent activists promoted causes that appealed to more people in Tatarstan on the personal level (for instance, working for a clean and safe environment) and created opportunities for networking. Additionally, local government officials had no institutional leverage over independent activists; therefore, the activists were relatively free to seek the support of the

federal government agencies. The socially oriented organizations' dependency on government, on the one hand, facilitated their informal access to government officials. On the other hand, their demands were easier to ignore, as the social oriented activists avoided conflicts with authorities at all costs. Finally, political activists were the most disadvantaged group in using personal contacts and hardly had any access to government officials.

Civil society activists' direct appeal to government officials was institutionalized as a channel of communication. All but the pro-state activists preferred to have a more stable foundation for state – civil society relations. At the same time, independent and social oriented activists saw certain value in trying to transform the elite's mindset by explaining the consequences of their decisions. They expressed a similar sentiment as the generation of dissidents who had come before them and who had tried to convince the Communist party leaders to embrace changes necessary for *perestroika* to occur (see, e.g., Spencer, 2010). Despite the fact that the CSOs' relations with like-minded government officials enhanced some civil society initiatives, it was not an effective long-term communication strategy. As Tatarstan's civil society remained divided, personal contacts with government officials provided band-aid solutions to a complex situation.

Furthermore, personal contacts sometimes brought constructive outcomes, yet they also contributed to sustaining corruption and inequality. President Putin's annual call-in show and other tools of direct communication with the authorities (Schuler, 2015; Henry, 2012) highlight the impotence of the judicial and other institutional mechanisms in every social and political sphere. With the exception of several pro-state activists, the research participants argued that this system of top-level involvement in every civil society issue was excessive. However, they also believed that only contacting "the first person," meaning either the president of Tatarstan

Minnikhanov or President Putin, could resolve virtually any problem. Several activists had their concerns delivered to top-level decisionmakers and witnessed positive, yet temporary results.

In addition to being inaccessible for the majority of CSOs, this approach led to further conservation of the authoritarian structures in Tatarstan, granting all power to the state's leader. Civil society dependence on personal contacts inadvertently contributed to the conventional defiance of institutions. In addition, relying on personal contacts froze conflicts instead of permanently resolving them. In particular, whenever federal authorities intervened, the local government responded with massive PR campaigns to cover up its violations, while the development of mutually beneficial solutions remained stalled.

Institutional mechanisms of communication. According to the study participants, there were two institutional structures available to civil society activists in Tatarstan: the people's monitoring system and the Public Chamber of Tatarstan. The respondents agreed that the monitoring system had the potential of becoming an effective communication mechanism. It was also the only tool that did not involve any time-consuming bureaucratic procedures and required minimal experience of civic activism from its users. Similar to social media, the people's monitoring system allowed people to express their discontent with various government services and call the authorities to action. To some extent, the people's monitoring system replicated the practice of contacting the top leaders, however, it was more accessible and less efficient. This system focused mostly on smaller apolitical issues, such as forcing municipalities to fill in potholes on Tatarstan's roads, and it did not provide a space to challenge corruption, which had led to the building poor quality roads in the first place. In addition, the system of people's monitoring had been set by the government to establish direct communication with citizens bypassing CSOs. Whether intentional or not, this system weakened the institutionalized forms of

civil society and sustained the division of the civil society sector.

The Public Chamber was the only formal communication framework between the state and Tatarstan's civil society. The interviewees disagreed about the value of the Public Chamber. Unlike the majority of the respondents, representatives of the pro-state organizations provided entirely positive feedback regarding their experiences with the Public Chamber. Above all, the Public Chamber served as a space for collaboration on the joint projects with other member organizations as well as for raising concerns to government agencies. In general, socially oriented activists recognized the potential of being affiliated with the Public Chamber, which equipped them with resources and leverage, especially outside the capital city of Tatarstan. For socially oriented organizations, the Public Chamber remained a tool for cooperation, allowing their projects to travel faster to the policymakers. A few research participants also named the Public Chamber as a place for designing a joint strategy with other socially oriented CSOs.

However, political and independent activists were not represented in the Chamber, which limited its potential for connecting activists from different civil society sectors. Typically, independent activists did not belong to a registered NGO and, thus, had no access to the Public Chamber. The same applied to political organizations, which were treated as the political opposition parties, not CSOs. The Public Chamber could not fully reflect the diversity of Tatarstan's civil society sector because all of these segments were not fully represented. Above all else, the overrepresentation of the government appointed members in the Public Chamber raised concerns among many civil society activists. They believed that the state representatives were impacting the decisions of the Public Chamber.

Consequently, the development of a transparent self-regulating cooperation model independent of government regulation and designed by civil society activists has become

increasingly important. This system has to include the widespread participation of citizens in authoring the agenda for civil society to move away from the current civil society model, in which CSOs are disconnected from the opportunities to learn from people directly as, for example, in the people's monitoring system. This knowledge could increase the ability of CSOs to synthesize and prioritize issues based on people's experiences and advocate for them at the governance level.

Incorporating civil society activists. Tatarstan's government preferred to play safely in its relations with civil society activists despite the existing communication mechanisms. An attempt to settle disagreements with civil society activists by offering them (albeit limited) power to promote their cause using government resources, suggests that Tatarstan's authorities' strategy aligns with Moscow's. Despite being highly paternalistic, both federal and regional strategies provide activists (especially independent and socially oriented CSOs) with some space for negotiation. Several research participants named cases when the prominent civic activists were offered government positions or support in the areas of their expertise. Although professional mobility between the public offices and CSOs is not always unhealthy, the research participants argued that in Tatarstan it was intended to mitigate civic activism.

The divide and rule tactics of regional government contributed to the weakening of the civil society sector in Tatarstan. Nevertheless, the study participants had mixed opinions about their colleagues joining government offices. On the one hand, these former activists gained communication tools to better serve the people; on the other hand, their successes were marred by their failures to resist the government's pressure and stand up to their beliefs. On a personal level, the interviewees conceded that the decision to leave civic activism could be motivated by many factors, including professional burnout and the stability of a government job.

The use of funding to control civic activism. Funding was another powerful mechanism used by the local authorities to keep CSOs in line with the government agenda. In Tatarstan, funding was used both as a hard and a soft tool for regulating civil society activism. As a soft tool, the funding accelerated the government's agenda for the services provided by CSOs. The study participants attested that funding was available for specific issues and target groups (for example, youth engagement). This nontransparent funding model often created dependency for socially oriented CSOs on government grants as their major sources of funding. It also made CSOs accountable to their main donors – the federal and regional governments – and undermined their capacity to remain accountable to their target groups.

The funding was also limited by the enforcement of the "foreign agent law," which had banned CSO funding from foreign sources. Organizations that could not survive without this funding had to decide either on cutting their services or continuing to disclose their foreign donations and face persecution. In the course of this research, several Tatarstan CSOs were added to the "foreign agents" list.

With foreign funding sources blacklisted, Tatarstan's socially oriented organizations were compelled to compete for regional and federal grants and subsidies. In practice, pro-state organizations benefitted from this funding scheme the most by confirming their compliance with the donor's agenda. The study participants from these organizations were more contented with government funding than other socially oriented CSOs. Additionally, the government authorized loyal organizations to duplicate the work of the existing CSOs, while some government officials sometimes appropriated the successes of civil society activists.

Enforcement mechanisms. Tatarstan's government used enforcement mechanisms against the least cooperative civil society activists. The repressions were the most sensitive topic

in my conversations with the research participants. While some activists (political, in particular) eagerly shared their experiences of harassment and prosecution, many activists chose a neutral position. The pro-state participants barely mentioned any enforcement mechanisms. Nevertheless, all of the research participants had experienced some level of pressure from the government agencies.

First and foremost, mechanisms of enforcement included the legal framework that regulated Tatarstan's civil society sector. Socially oriented activists claimed that the legal overregulation was a tremendous obstacle to their work. In particular, small initiatives suffered from this overregulation because they were unable to provide excessive documentation. The overregulation hindered the potential of grassroots initiatives, in which the CSOs were incapable of hiring specialized personnel but enthusiastic about investing their own time into civil society projects. The legal overregulation was one of the key reasons why the independent activists opted out from organizing themselves into formal nonprofits. The political CSOs noted that the legal barriers were even higher, often blocking them from forming a political party or running in elections.

Moreover, the federal and regional laws regulating public meetings (also known as the "rally law"), which limited the constitutional freedom to assemble peacefully, had a negative impact on political and independent activists in Tatarstan. Organizations and individuals had to receive formal permission to assemble in public spaces from the government agencies, usually the municipalities. Whereas the federal law was anti-constitutional in its nature, the subsequent regional act contradicted both the constitution and the federal law. According to Tatarstan's "rally law" (see Zakon RT, 2012), the organizers had to report the goal, time, place, and the number of people attending the public assembly. Failure to do so resulted in fines or even

criminal charges for the organizers. The "rally law" allowed the authorities to deny the right to public assembly based on formally legal grounds. The independent and political study participants had most of their rally applications rejected. The fabricated reasons for such rejection included, for instance, a claim that there was no public space available in Kazan for the activists to assemble. A public assembly that violated the initial application (for instance, the exceeding number of participants) resulted in charges for the organizers.

In the past, the parliament or other government buildings held the most successful protests (for example, against paid fishing). Under the "rally law," public assembly was prohibited near government offices, including educational and medical facilities. Tatarstan's authorities, thus, ensured that any public gatherings at their front door would be deemed illegal. Challenging this provision (as many others) in Tatarstan's Constitutional Court was unsuccessful. The research participants argued that the laws violating the constitution were impossible to revoke in the court of law. Activists considered the absence of the independent judiciary to be the most powerful enforcement mechanism used by Tatarstan's government against civil society. While the activists strove to withstand the pressure from the law enforcement agencies, their inability to challenge police brutality and unlawful detentions in court undermined their efforts. As pointed by the research participants, the authorities were less likely to persecute apolitical protesters compared to the representatives of political organizations. Indirectly, however, legal limitations impacted every Tatarstan's CSO by limiting cross-sectoral collaboration and disabling the most vocal advocates.

The complexity of state – civil society relations. The relations between Tatarstan's government and civil society are more nuanced than the explicit polarization between the cooperative NGOs and the suppression of anti-government protest groups. While civil society

needed working relations with the state, the state was also limited in the enforcement measures it could apply against civil society. In some cases, the regional government relied on successful CSOs to gain its own legitimacy. Consequently, the state did not always support socially oriented NGOs nor did it suppress all protest movements. Further, federal and regional governments often had divergent views on civil society, which was used as leverage by civic activists in Tatarstan. Unlike other Russian contexts, Tatarstan's government did not try to partner with civic activists to counter federal authorities (with the exception of the short-lived case of teaching the Tatar language in schools). Conversely, Tatarstan's activists often searched for and occasionally received support from the federal government.

The regional authorities were not against compromising on specific issues and, in fact, welcomed certain best CSOs' practices. However, they blocked all attempts of including CSOs into long-term policymaking. The successful examples of impacting government policies implied drawing attention through public action or protest. When working to create an accessible environment for persons with disabilities, activists invited government officials to a wheelchair tour in the downtown and, after a few events, the disabled people's accessibility to the downtown improved. At the same time, the organization representing the people living with disabilities was not included in the policymaking on a regular basis and, thus, their impact on policy remained irregular. Similarly, the HIV-prevention organizations claimed a minimal impact at the policy level, where the local knowledge had not always been welcomed, confronting the state's denial of the HIV/AIDS epidemics in Tatarstan.

The weakening of civil society in its relations with the government also influenced the ability of Tatarstan's CSOs to serve as an economic force. In the early 1990s, Tatarstan's CSOs supported the regional government in negotiating favourable economic arrangements with the

federal centre. Later, however, the economic contribution of civil society was reduced to service provision. Whereas the need for services is often determined by global and local economic conditions, these services also define CSOs' role in society (Akingbola, et al., 2019). In Tatarstan, CSOs still had the potential to be an economic driving force. Aggressive residential and industrial development revealed citizens' concerns of environmental hazards, and stimulated the emergence of environmentalist groups. As economic factors were driving the change within the civil society sector, environmental CSOs were advocating for rigorous citizens' control over the private sector. They were also setting new standards for city planning and heritage conservation.

Unequal relations with the government. Although the experiences of the research participants varied depending on the civil society sub-sector they represented, the majority spoke about the paternalistic attitude of the authorities toward CSOs. The exploitation of the tensions between different segments of civil society and the promotion of the divide between the pro- and anti-state organizations facilitated the channeling of civic activism. The interviews demonstrated that the relations between Tatarstan's civil society activists and the federal and local governments were increasingly asymmetrical. Whereas the state had developed various formal tools of communication, most of them masked its unwillingness to partner in dialogue with the CSOs.

The study participants resented having unequal relations with the government more than the financial or legal restrictions. Regardless of their affiliation, they had all experienced a certain level of neglect of their initiatives by the government, despite demonstrating the highest levels of expertise in their respective areas. The independent participants argued that projects could be implemented efficiently and at a lower cost if CSOs were respected as partners.

Meanwhile, government funding for civil society projects was often misused. Socially oriented research participants, including pro-state activists, reported making changes to their projects to maintain working relations with their partnering ministries. Many were frustrated that after years of collaboration with the authorities they still had not won their respect.

Finally, the political activists noted that when their organizations attempted socially beneficial projects, the government saw them as competitors for popular support. Social and economic issues were the most widely supported civil society causes in Tatarstan. The effective resolution of these social issues by the political activists and their possible combination with CSOs political demands could strengthen the opposition. Tatarstan's authorities were comfortable with political activists as long as they pursued political goals and, thus, could be restrained effectively. The efforts of political organizations to develop comprehensive responses to current economic and social issues and implement them through the available governing mechanisms were met with resistance by the local government. Political activists claimed that the government's denial of civil society's access to governance was triggered by the elite's fear of losing political power if the opposition's social initiatives succeeded. Overall, the research participants believed that unless they had an equal voice in decision-making, they would continue to encounter obstructions in realizing their mandate.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the theme of Tatarstan's state – civil society relations as narrated by the study participants. Both the federal and regional governments have significantly impacted the development of civil society through institutions, legislation, and the informal rules of the game. Regardless of their affiliation, all civil society activists experienced unequal relations with

the government and were pressured when they refused to comply. Despite the fact that some mechanisms of communication with authorities were available to socially oriented organizations, they were created top-down and did not adequately respond to the needs of the civil society sector. In addition, government policies contributed to the division within the civil society sector and limited space for the CSOs communication with the population.

The following chapter explores the relations between civil society and Tatarstan's residents, and the instruments civic activists have used to increase the meaningful engagement of the population.

Chapter 7

Civil society and local participation

Introduction

Local support and participation in civil society initiatives is crucial in challenging power relations. The power of civil society is created by interaction and it does not simply rest within civil society (Fowler, 2010). Meaningful participation determines the quality of the civil society sector and its relevance to people's everyday needs. If people recognize civil society as a valid means of impacting the decision-making process, their involvement in civil society initiatives may demonstrate the willingness of the local population to take ownership over domestic affairs. Researchers have argued that mass mobilization often leads to democratic outcomes (Coelho & Von Lieres, 2010; Nepstad, 2013). At a minimum, participation in CSOs is key to their legitimacy and representation (Elstub, 2010). On the contrary, the lack of participation limits civil society from exercising its functions effectively. Only the local authorship of political transformation, in which the agency of people is thoroughly considered against structural and cultural limitations can guarantee its sustainability (Donais, 2012; Duffy, 2009; Mac Ginty, 2010; Richmond, 2011b). Moreover, without broad participation civil society is easily manipulated to serve the interests of the economic and political elites (Elstub, 2010).

The research participants reported some correlation with the general trends described in the literature on Russian civil society (for example, Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010; Ljubownikow & Crotty, 2017; Silvan, 2015) and they highlighted the significance of local participation in the successes or failures of their projects. In their interviews, the respondents outlined key patterns of local support to civil society initiatives, which I now discuss in this chapter. Although I had identified some of the general participation trends in the literature prior

to the field research, all the themes in this chapter have emerged inductively from the data in line with the grounded theory methodology.

Participation in civil society organizations and groups was a crosscutting theme appearing in different interview sections. Having identified the importance of public participation, I included questions related to the participation of the local population in CSOs into my questionnaire (see Appendices 5 and 6). In particular, I asked the research participants how they collaborated with the local people, in particular, what target groups they had, how they communicated with the representatives of those groups, and how people participated in their organizations' work. The participants were asked to provide specific examples of local participation in civil society initiatives and they were encouraged to evaluate successes and failures of this collaboration. The theme of participation also emerged from the respondents' responses to other questions, in particular, when they were describing successes and challenges their organizations faced. Local participation was described both in the success stories of building up popular support and as a current challenge for many of Tatarstan's CSOs. In addition, the topic of public participation was also touched upon in responses to other questions.

This chapter is divided into the subsections that reflect the main issues related to public participation as narrated by the study participants. I outlined the themes as they relate to various participation trends, rather than according to the CSO type. The first section outlines the key trends of local participation in Tatarstan's CSOs and includes: (1) the differences between online and real-life participation, (2) the support among different groups of the population, and (3) the role of CSOs in obtaining local knowledge before translating it to the governance level. Section 2 investigates (4) the strategies civil society activists employed to recruit support. Research participants also pinpointed (5) the issues of high and low popular support among local people,

which I explored in the third section. In the fourth section, I focus on (6) government dependency as a pre-condition for low popular support of CSOs.

Key trends of local participation in CSOs

Regardless of their affiliation, the activists acknowledged that the level of trust of Tatarstan's CSOs was growing. On the one hand, there were more people working and volunteering in formal organizations, such as youth organizations. On the other hand, people united around important issues, such as the environment, without any top-down interference. Positive experiences of local engagement in civil society projects indicated several major trends.

On-line vs. real life participation. Tatarstan's population remained more active in social media than in real life – a feature that has been previously pointed out in relation to political protests in Russia in general (Epileva & Magun, 2014). There was an active core of civil society operating in Tatarstan, which was represented by several organizations and activist groups. These people were ready to take risks and to gain local people's support to resist multi-million development projects. These activists saw the advancement of the Internet as leverage for civil society to burgeon in Tatarstan. Due to Russia's complete control of the mass media the Internet remained the most de-regulated and accessible space (Nikoporets-Takigava & Pain, 2016) and civil society activists used the opportunity to connect with people through various online media tools. Nevertheless, the positive impact of online civic engagement was still limited. For example, Karina noted that civil society initiatives attracted significantly more support in social media than in real life. She reported that, "During the Tatfondbank crisis, when there were thousands, millions of people affected all around the republic, there were around 8, 9,10

thousand people in telegram, vkontakte, [and] other messengers, but in fact, 150-300 people came to the protests. The biggest [protest] they had [attracted] 600 people."

Although the interviewees worked in very different organizations and even spheres, they were familiar with many civic activists personally and argued that the civil society sector beyond social networks in Tatarstan was relatively small. Dinar noted that, "I have noticed that in Kazan the number of [civic activists] does not go beyond several hundred at best [and] some initiatives are local. So, yes, there are active citizens but I think I know them all. In other words, there are [very few] people who are active outside Facebook."

All of the study participants felt that social media provided a much-needed space where civil society activists could communicate freely and reach out to the general public. However, active online participation rarely translated into real life support for CSOs, and social media followers mostly remained bystanders.

Participation among different groups. The local support for civil society initiatives was larger among certain groups within the overall population. University and high school students were the most active group in both socially oriented and political organizations. Yet, as Elise Boulding (2000) has argued, children and youth had long been denied the right to express their agency. The denial of the youth's agency was observed during political protests in Russia (Nechai & Goncharov, 2017). CSOs seek to transform this pattern and include youth in their activities. Tatarstan's youth, above all else, supported pro-government youth organizations and sports events volunteerism. In their interviews, the activists from the youth pro-government organizations asserted that they had received overwhelming support from their target groups. From the onset, these CSOs had a lot of resources to recruit support from their target groups (Reichert, 2015) by working directly with the universities and receiving extensive government

funding for their projects. The study participants from the pro-government organizations asserted that they did not need to actively recruit anymore because young people learned about them from friends, school, and social media.

At the same time, young Tatar people were active supporters of the political CSOs. In particular, a lot of young people supported Alexey Navalny's Shtab.38 Organizations with a political agenda in Russia have traditionally aimed their efforts at recruiting people under 18 years-of-age. Navalny was one of the first political activists who realized the potential of these future voters; his rallies are regularly attended by youth under the age of 18. Representatives of Tatarstan's political organizations complemented youth on their activism. This is what Vadim had to say on the issue:

VADIM: Well, a lot of youth … starting from the age of 14 come to our office. There wasn't so much youth in the protest before. Well, there were young [university] students. Now to Navalny's … rallies come [middle-school] students … [who are] 13-14-year-old. 14-year-olds come to volunteer at our headquarters.

Although political activists claimed to represent everyone, their strategic use of social media helped to recruit support mostly among younger people. The study participants representing political organizations advocated for recruiting youth rather than any other age group. Vadim reported on this issue in the following way:

VADIM: The youth is becoming more political. It used to be apolitical. They will be

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38 *Shab* literally translates as headquarters. Alexey Navanly has chosen this name for the branches of his organization around Russia.

different people … real people, citizens. The generation of their parents is awful. They are like vegetables in the garden. They [the youth] will finally become human beings. And there will be a colossal shift in our country.

Other activists, however, remained critical about the youth engagement strategy advocated by the political organizations. They believed that the youth were easier to recruit owing not only to their active political stance but also due to their limited experience of the 1990s democratic transition. Karina pointed out that, "The 17-year-old kids cannot say why it was good in the 2000s and it's bad now … they don't know. They only know that Lesha [Alexey Navalny] says it [is true]. It is also some sort of propaganda."

In contrast, environmental issues united people regardless of their social background, or political and religious views. Lilia noted that her support group consisted of workers and academics, former offenders, former police officers, Putin supporters, and his opponents. However, environmental initiatives attracted less youth and more parents with young children. The study participants noted that the new mothers were particularly active in the environmental protection groups because they were genuinely concerned about making sure that there was a safe environment for their children. In general, environmental issues recruited those who spent more time in the parks and other natural grounds, namely young parents, dog owners, and athletes.

With the few exceptions of the environmentalist groups, middle-aged[39] people rarely participated in Tatarstan's CSOs. According to Anna, many of the middle-aged people were planning to move further away from Kazan, and, thus, were not committed to fostering any change in the local milieu:

[39] The research participants used the term '*srednii vozrast*' generally referring to people between 30-50 years of age.

ANNA: To Tatarstan, and to Kazan specifically, people come for jobs. The majority of

Kazan citizens are not Indigenous to Kazan, they are the people who came to work. They

came to make money and that's exactly what they are doing. For some, for 30 percent [of

citizens], Kazan is a stopover. They plan to move to Moscow or abroad.

A lot of these middle-aged people are *budgetniki* – state employees with low salaries,

such as schoolteachers or doctors – who are afraid of losing their small incomes.

The political activists mostly ignored this group, whereas socially oriented organizations

struggled to include them in their projects. Independent activists suggested economic reasons

behind the *budgetniki's* passivity. According to Dinar, the *budgetniki* often worked several jobs

and were not aware of the civil society initiatives due to a lack of time. Similarly, Anna asserted

the following in her narrative:

ANNA: The segment [of society] which is called *budgetniki* … is simply concerned with

their economic situation. In other words, when a person is trying to put some food on the

table, he cannot care for other things. It's common not only for the Russian Federation

but for the rest of the world. If a person has nothing to feed his children with, he'll be

thinking how to feed them instead of joining Navalny's rally.

The research participants argued that retired people were considerably more active in

small neighbourhood projects. They invested their main resource – time – to meet with

government officials to draw their attention to various issues. Yet, there were fewer older people

who regularly participated in civil society projects and very few CSOs (mostly, socially oriented) that worked with this target group.

Unlike other socially oriented organizations, religious organizations claimed that their participation was growing steadily among all age groups. During the 1990s, together with the secular nationalist organizations, Muslim organizations thrived. Malika remembers her first experience of starting a Muslim female group in the 1990s. She avowed that, "There were no formalities, bureaucracy or other problems. It was … in the early 1990s. In other words, Muslims coming together was fine." Religious organizations also transmitted their ideas to the policy level through their religious institutions and leaders, and were less concerned with representation, experiencing hardly any difficulties with recruiting support. Malika reported that, "In the religious sphere, there is a beautiful moment, for instance, if you organize something and invite [someone] it doesn't matter if this person has money or not, he will come. He borrows [the money] because he knows that [he] has to."

The respondents, in particular, those representing political organizations, often attributed low participation and turnout among older age groups to a specific mentality. At the same time, political activists used communication tools that were predominantly aimed at attracting youth support. For instance, pro-government youth organizations used *vkontakte* and other social media, whereas young supporters of Alexey Navalny often became volunteers after watching his videos on YouTube. Hence, the majority of CSOs intentionally laid their hopes on the new generation of civic activists. Marat pointed out that, "We shouldn't get upset that some people don't want the change [or] are afraid of change. Because one generation is leaving, the next one is coming. And it [the new generation] is different, it's all with the gadgets."

The research participants identified a higher participation rate in CSOs among the

younger compared to the older generation. Young people were particularly active in the organizations with a political agenda and in the pro-government youth organizations. Conversely, civil society space between both of these poles (anti-government and pro-government) was claimed by people in their late 20s to early 40s, who engaged in independent groups and socially oriented CSOs. The activists also argued that the lowest participation rates were among older people and government employees.

Translating local knowledge into governance. The scarcity of instruments to translate information from the population to the governance level was complemented by the lack of mechanisms for civil society groups to receive and process this local knowledge from their target groups and broader communities. To act effectively as a connector between these levels, civil society needs to be close enough to the grassroots to learn from them (Lederach, 1997, 2016). Several socially oriented study participants stressed that they had a deep knowledge of the problems of target groups and strove to engage them both in developing organizational strategy, and in translating it into policies. In particular, an HIV prevention nonprofit in Tatarstan initiated regular meetings between its clients and government representatives, revealing the officials' limited knowledge about Tatarstan's HIV positive people.

Still, many activists assumed that their own knowledge spoke to the experiences of other members of their target groups. The political activists suggested that generally, they had better ideas for civic activism than the rest of the population. Their opinions overlapped with the common protest discourse that separates "simple people" who are politically passive from "normal people" (or *intelligentsia*) who remain politically active and immune to state propaganda (Kalinin, 2018, pp. 54–55). Tatarstan's political activists were encouraged to take initiative but within a rigid framework, for instance, Vadim noted that, "We talk to them (the

public), tell them about the campaign and what needs to be done, what help we need." Likewise, Grigory confirmed that, "[the organization] gives us clear instructions what you can do, what you can't do."

In the pro-government NGOs, most ideas on improving the work came from organizations' leadership. Then, these ideas were negotiated with the sectoral ministries that often had a different vision for the development of a specific nonprofit organization. The members of these organizations were selected from specific target groups (for instance, student-led student organizations). However, pro-government organizations were established without consulting with their target groups. The study participants (including activists representing these pro-state organizations) agreed that their organizations were, ultimately, accountable to the government rather than to the targeted populations. It would be unfair to say that the pro-state organizations never consulted with their target groups. For instance, Marina, Roman and Arina, who were the members of these organizations, argued that they always communicated with their target groups to improve their organizations' activities and welcomed any criticism. While this feedback helped to improve operational issues, it did not impact the policy level due to the arrangements between the pro-state organizations and the authorities.

The study participants also believed that independent groups and social movements were more committed to learning from the people they represented. They regularly invited the public to formulate their concepts, consulted with experts to improve these raw ideas, and attempted to translate them to the governance level. For instance, Idris noticed that, "I think that the public should be able to formulate concepts, perhaps, short ones, not very professional. But [we] should also try to invite experts [to refine them]." Commenting on the role of activists in her civil society group, Lilia echoed Idris's perspective on civic activists as dialogue facilitators noting

that, "I was a … moderator between the experts, people who wanted explanations, representatives of business … and the local authorities."

The majority of the study participants believed in the importance of learning from the people they represented. In practice, however, only some (mostly, independent activists) shared their best practices of initiating a feedback process from their target groups and implementing this feedback into practice. Instead, many of Tatarstan's political and socially oriented CSOs opted for top-down decision-making with regards to the needs of their target groups.

Recruitment and representation

The recruitment strategies used by Tatarstan's civil society groups and organizations also reflected their appreciation of local knowledge. Civil society utilized several key strategies to increase popular support. First, the study participants engaged with the public directly in meetings, rallies, and various public events. Political organizations used direct communication with the population more commonly before the new legislation limited their right to assemble. The only available strategy for direct engagement included distributing leaflets in the streets of Kazan. Despite the risk of being accused of organizing an unsanctioned rally the activists used leaflet distribution to talk with people. Grigory pointed out that, "The best advocate is the person who believes in this [cause] himself." Usually, this type of recruitment was combined with posters and the distribution of leaflets to mailboxes. Vadim noted that the latter was the least preferred (as it did not allow for any feedback) but necessary strategy to reach out and engage more people.

Independent activists also found direct conversations with people more productive and educational. Ivan shared his experience of recruiting public support to stop the construction of an incineration plant in Kazan. This is what he had to say:

> IVAN: I personally went to collect signatures [for the petition] and talked [about the situation] …. Those who didn't know anything when they learn [about the problem] they gladly signed. There were those, who were sort of for [signing] it but they had a shallow understanding [of the problem] and the minimal information I was able to provide them was enough to convince them.

Direct conversations with people were often more effective than using social media. Some study participants found the direct communication with the public to be an eye-opening experience. The well-educated middle-class professionals often had to change their language and make their initiatives accessible to everyone. Lilia shared with me that her experience of direct recruitment had been a very humbling experience:

> LILIA: It is more difficult for me than for the other members of our movement to approach old ladies and explain to them something … I am used to a certain level of discourse. But actually, I should [talk to people directly]. If [I have approached people] not from the position of a journalist, not as a Facebook blogger … the effects would have been different.

Some activists admitted that they preferred to have less direct communication with people and use social media as an intermediary. Fanis noted that, "[We communicate] mostly online, a little offline because of the government ... but also because people and activists themselves do not want to interact deeply with each other."

Socially oriented organizations also reached out to the public directly. The pro-state organizations had easier access to universities where they recruited participants for their events. They also had branches to recruit support through their representatives around the republic. Having a narrower focus helped socially oriented organizations to limit the spaces for recruitment to schools, universities, popular youth coffee shops, and co-working spaces. They also recruited public support by reaching out to people through professionals in a specific field. Socially oriented organizations without government support, both in terms of funding and connections, were more limited in their resources to engage people directly. These activists (for example, animal rescue activists) often approached people directly to promote their cause, yet their direct engagement with the public was time consuming and emotionally consuming. The participants claimed that they encourage people to participate but avoided forcing them. Boris contended that, "We do not have a goal to intervene everywhere. We are open to everyone, information is open to everyone, come over friends, get [what you need]. But to say that we will come to you, no, we don't do that. But [we] are always happy to interact."

The mass media was another communication tool used by Tatarstan's civil society activists. The interviewees used the mass media to inform the public about their projects, recruit popular support, and fundraising. Nonetheless, only a few outlets in Tatarstan (mostly online) published independent opinions, while the government-sponsored foundation Tatmedia mostly controlled Tatarstan's mass media. The majority of Tatarstan's population, especially older

people, learned their news from TV channels that were controlled by the government. Thus, the use of mass media had a limited impact on the recruitment of public support by the study participants.

The restriction by the NGO law on public assembly made it nearly impossible to get permission to carry out public events for anyone but pro-government organizations. Persons organizing an event could be arrested if they did not have government permission to do so. As a result of these limitations, the Internet, and social media specifically, has become the main communication tool for Russia's civil society activists (White & McAllister, 2014). Many study participants noted that the legislation left limited opportunities for public protest and pushed activists to use the online tools. Dinar articulated that, "We have moved from the public events to [online] media … which has also been impacted by the legislation." Additionally, social media was the most effective way to collaborate with other activists in Russia and, importantly, with other civil society activists in Tatarstan who often lacked resources; the social media was free to use.

The use of social media strategies depended on the goal of an organization. Political organizations' key goal was to spread the information and recruit volunteers and voters. The social media also provided them with an opportunity to effectively reach out to the most politically active population group – youth. Independent activists used social media to receive feedback and organize quickly. Socially oriented organizations focused on using social media to stay in touch with the target groups. These distinctions defined the choice of utilizing specific online media tools. Political activists noted that they preferred the encrypted Telegram, as the safest space for communication with other CSOs. They also used Facebook and YouTube as the Russian government did not control them and they improved their interaction with younger

people. The majority of socially oriented and independent activists continued to use the Russian

social network, *vkontakte*, which was heavily monitored by the Russian security services. The

research participants representing these groups claimed that using *vkontakte* allowed them to

reach out to the population outside of Facebook or Telegram. They realized that they were

exposing themselves to the security services yet felt it was necessary to connect with their target

groups and beyond.

Issues with low and high popular support

Although their evaluation of popular support for civil society varies, political, socially

oriented, and independent activists asserted that Tatarstan's population was generally passive.

There were sporadic bursts of participation rather than a steady interest in civic activism. This

passivity was not significantly challenged by the 2011-2012 protests, as some researchers had

hoped (Ross, 2015). The difference in popular support reflected the division between socially

oriented organizations and organizations with a political agenda. Tatarstan's people expressed

less support for organizations with a political agenda. Anna noted the following in her story:

> ANNA: How many people came to Lesha's [Alexey Navalny's] meeting when he came
>
> …? Well, there were 100 people who came to meet him. Well, yes, later … 1500 [people]
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> according to [Navalny supporters or] 500 according to police went to *Krylia Sovetov* park
>
> and so on. But … what is 1500 for Kazan? It's nothing.

Further, the representatives of socially oriented organizations also expressed concerns

regarding local participation in civil society initiatives. Local participation varied depending on

the issue. In particular, the locals' understanding of civil society as an unpaid work often obstructed small-scale neighbourhood initiatives, as Tatarstan's residents believed that those initiatives should be carried out by paid professionals. These initiatives were apolitical at their core and were aimed at improving the immediate surroundings and introducing better management of the territory. It seems that these issues should concern all people living in the neighbourhood, yet community activists often struggled to mobilize support.

Margarita spent several years trying to improve the management system of her apartment block, the children's playground, and the neighbouring territory. To achieve these goals, she organized a community council but she also needed the support of the apartment owners to move the initiative forward. The apartments, which were once owned by the government, were privatized in the 1990s with the advance of private property in Russia. However, people did not fully recognize their responsibility to take care of their communal spaces. Margarita named the lack of people's participation as one of the most critical obstacles in her civic activity. Margarita reported that, "Of course, people don't care. It's the main difficulty that people don't want anything, they don't care. It's impossible to get them out to a meeting … no one wants to work for free."

Likewise, there was a lack of support for initiatives focused on marginalized communities, in particular, CSOs working with HIV-positive people. Both local and federal governments have ignored the HIV/AIDS epidemics in Tatarstan (Beyrer, Wirtz, & Kazatchkine, 2017). The stigmatization of HIV positive people within the health and educational systems by the official media masked the significance of this issue. As a consequence, the majority of Tatarstan's population either ignored the statistics on epidemics or blamed it on HIV positive people's "wrong lifestyle." Karim the activist working in HIV prevention noted that, "No one

likes addicts, everyone is afraid of HIV, therefore it is a very unpopular topic. [It is] an unpopular stigmatized topic, which people are not ready to embrace."

Despite the rise in volunteerism in Tatarstan[40], organizations working in HIV prevention were not popular destinations for volunteers. The activists explained that it was nearly impossible for them to reach beyond their target group and attract public support. They confirmed the importance of educating the public but they also had very limited resources to do so. They used what few resources they had to serve their clients' most pressing needs. The only support these organizations received came from their own target group and people who had an intimate knowledge of the problem. Alfia contended that, "With HIV prevention … only those [people] who have this problem do something. Well, if someone got exposed to it maybe not himself maybe [because] his relative [has] this illness. Today it's more like everyone [thinks] it's not in my backyard."

The situation around public support for HIV prevention organizations was somewhat similar to the organizations helping other stigmatized groups, such as former offenders, drug addicts or sex workers. Several activists noted that popular support was more common when they were fundraising for sick children but were nearly impossible when searching for committed volunteers for HIV prevention organizations. Besides stigmatization, the public also wanted to see the immediate results of their support. Damir argued that when Tatar people supported civil society initiatives financially, they wanted to see immediate and optimistic outcomes. He suggested that it was harder to fundraise for terminally ill children than for children with prospects of recovery.

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[40] According to the Volunteering and Information Resource Centre (administered by the government of Tatarstan), the number of volunteers has increased from 46 735 in 2018 to 57 832 in 2019 ("Our team got bigger," 2019).

In addition, less government funding was allocated to unpopular problems, shaping the civil society sector accordingly. It was typical for the pro-government activists to avoid low-support issues. The government donors determined their target groups and the agendas complied with government priorities. As a result, the issues that the pro-state organizations pursued focused mainly on youth and immigration/ethnic policies.

The study participants suggested that the support for another type of civil society activism – sporadic social protests – was also insufficient. Although this type of civic activism at times brought together hundreds of people, social protests received little support outside the circle of people directly impacted by a certain problem. Moreover, not all civil society activists supported social protests. Anna explained this issue in the following manner:

ANNA: When people were conned by the mortgage housing construction[41] [company][42], only the conned shareholders and their families went to protest, there were [only] a few civic activists. And even then, they were the civic activists who tried to improve their political image. When small and medium businesses were on the edge of bankruptcy because of the banking crisis, only small and medium entrepreneurs were protesting.

Environmental issues received support either from the people who felt immensely threatened or when environmental degradation was observable in real time. On the one hand, people protested when they noticed how the backfilling of the Volga stopped them from fishing, swimming and otherwise enjoying the riverbank. The destruction of the grove near the Kazanka

[41] The model of shared equity construction is very common in Russia. In some cases, co-investors are also eligible for the low-rate government supported mortgage loans. In either case, people co-invest into construction of condo buildings with an expectation to own property when it is built. However, there are many examples when co-investors are defrauded and the buyer funded development never materializes.
[42] All construction businesses in Tatarstan are affiliated with the ruling elite.

River, on the other hand, did not bring an immediate impact on the air quality in the city and was largely ignored by the public. The study participants argued that people in Kazan were ready to save their children's playground but they hesitated to take part in more comprehensive long-term environmental initiatives. Dinar noticed that when commenting on the unsuccessful attempts to stop the demolition of the grove near Kazanka River:

> DINAR: There is a feeling of [being] absolutely unsuccessful. In other words, there are blogs. There are articles that are very hard on the authorities and on the citizens as well because we understand that without broad participation of citizens even several dozens of activists will not be able to change the situation.

The research participants suggested that lower public support for certain civic initiatives, in particular, for political issues and HIV prevention, was also due to the region's conservative values. Egor noted that, "Tatarstan society … is very conservative. In general, conservative beliefs are, perhaps, common for the Russian society … but Tatarstan is even more conservative." Further, these values were promoted by specific regional policies. Compared to other regions, where the federal center has intervened frequently, Tatarstan's political and corporate systems were dominated by men from several local families (Salagaev et al., 2010). Ivan believed that the clan system in Tatarstan reinforced the passive mentality among people. Ivan noted that, "We are not the capital, we are … a province … People think it's useless to do anything because we have our own regime here, the so-called clannishness and so on, whatever you do, you won't succeed. I've been told I won't succeed every day."

Concurrently, the special regional arrangement has allocated more funding on the local level and supported the pro-government NGOs. Volunteerism was encouraged on all levels, including the largest suppliers of volunteers – universities, which enhanced participation in the pro-government organizations and shaped civil society in their favour. Pro-state activists based on their experience described people's local participation in Tatarstan as exceptional compared to what happened in other Russian regions.

Despite regional features, the research participants argued that all of Tatarstan's residents regardless of their ethnicity shared the same features of local participation. For instance, the activists representing minority groups criticized the low participation rate among their ethnic groups and the wider population. In English the word "Russian" speaks both about one's nationality and ethnicity, in Russian, the word *russkii* refers to ethnicity and *rossiianin* refers to nationality. The study participants attributed the lack of civic engagement to *rossiianin* and highlighted the importance of nationality rather than a specific ethnic group. They claimed that *rossiiane* (pl.) regardless of their ethnicity were culturally different from other European nations, which they explained by their "Soviet" mentality and learned government dependency. Marat asserted that, "We are Asians, we are different from the Europeans because any other European nation would have taken to the streets in protests long ago." Although this view on the local mentality was dominant, a few study participants tried to discover the underlying reasons for certain local behaviours. Based on her experiences in several socially oriented organizations, Rezeda offered an interesting insight on this topic:

REZEDA: For instance, psychological counseling [services are] really difficult [to offer to] Russian citizens because [they] unlike, for example, their Western counterparts, are

afraid of the word counseling. Working with my audiences, I figured out that many did

need counseling but would only accept it if no one else knew about it. 'I am ready to

accept it but not ready to talk about it.' Again, all these things you figure out when you

work with people.

The research participants admitted that Tatarstan's residents participated in their projects

reluctantly. The only exception were the initiatives people could either personally relate to or

they were issues that they focused on that posed an imminent threat to people's wellbeing.

Political activists and the activists working with marginalized communities were more concerned

with low participation rates compared to the other study participants.

People's dependency on government

The local population's dependency on government has emerged as a common theme in

the interviews with many study participants. The respondents related the problems with the

public's lack of participation in civil society to the mentality of Russian people. Indeed, the

decades of the existence of authoritarian regimes in Russia has led to government domination in

all spheres of life (Carnaghan, 2007; Tsygankov, 2014; Volkov & Goncharov, 2015). The

political culture, including people's attitudes to the government has transformed within

generations (Gel'man, 2018). At the same time, the disconnection between the new *intelligentsia*

– the creative class – and the rest of the people (the "herd," the "mob") juxtaposes cultural

divisions that exist within Russian society (Kalinin, 2018).

The role of government in fostering government dependency is hard to overestimate. Every year, Vladimir Putin in his live broadcast responds to dozens of pleas from all over the country. People who are desperate to resolve their problems call the hotline to get the President's help (Schuler, 2015). As a result, governmental organizations are overloaded with unnecessary bureaucratic procedures that fail to resolve basic issues. In response, the population has developed a disinterest in the public sphere as a resilience technique. The majority of the population resolves their problems without using formal procedures or seeking help from institutions. Instead they resort to personal contacts or other informal means to communicate their ideas to government officials. Tamara pointed out that the Tatar population demonstrated great tolerance for injustice and displayed a lack of hope to make change, reporting that, "Our people are very patient. [They] would talk, cry and [then] get back to normal."

The respondents perceived civil society's dependency on Tatarstan's government to be a complex issue. On the one hand, the population distrusts any type of authority, and on the other hand, Tatarstan's citizens show little initiative to get involved. Many activists considered the public's low participation rate in the grassroots level as a root cause for similar problems at the higher political levels. The activists pointed out the differences between Western[43] forms of civil society and Tatarstan's civil society sector. Semyon identified the lack of bottom-level community initiatives in the following way:

SEMYON: Let's take [for example] a community in Canada or the U.S., how the residents behave there, how active they are and how interested [they are] in their own community to develop, and they try to do something. [In contrast], we [Russians] really

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[43] By "Western," Russians understand civil society forms that originated in Western European and North American countries.

don't care … there is no bottom-up movement.

Small community initiatives are usually a training ground for local activism, where people gain necessary skills for negotiating their interests and navigating through the bureaucratic obstacles. They are also important for cultivating community-building values and educating the younger generation about civic participation (London, 2010). With the exception of a few activists, Tatarstan's residents lacked the skills needed to organize themselves without an authoritative leader and to resolve small neighbourly disputes. Instead, the government often interfered by offering certain projects to civil society groups that suited the government's political agenda. Egor avowed that, "In general, people are quite indifferent … sometimes [it is] the government … that tries to somehow appease people [by saying] do this, let us offer you some civil society initiatives and you will bring them into life."

The interviewees suggested that the grassroots disinterest in small neighbourhood projects originated from the Soviet tradition of *subbotnik* – a Saturday for doing unpaid community work, usually to clean the streets of garbage or collect recyclable materials. *Subbotnik* was initially a volunteer tradition that became synonymous with unpaid obligatory work, and everyone tried to find a legitimate reason to escape it. Small community initiatives were similarly disregarded. Activists repeatedly called this mentality "a Soviet mentality." For example, Damir reported that, "Our parents … have been convinced during the Soviet time, well, first our parents and then they [convinced] us, that everything around us belongs to everyone. And what belongs to everyone belongs to no one. And if it belongs to no one we don't care."

The research participants admitted that their own choice of becoming activists was foisted upon them by the external circumstances that often posed a danger to their wellbeing

such as the building of the incineration plant close to their homes. People's yearning for stability

and "minding their own businesses" restricted many local people from taking action unless

external factors pushed them to do so. Ivan described this issue as follows:

> IVAN: In general, the passivity of the population is tremendous. I mean [there are]
>
> indeed movements, there are activists, there are leaders, but in general the majority of the
>
> society … is inert, passive because we [have] stability, we trust the authorities, and I am
>
> there with them. But [this is] only until the disaster happens, right?

The administration's widespread corruption also affected grassroots low participation

rates. According to the environmental activist – Lilia, Tatars felt helpless in opposing

government decisions based on the economic interests of the ruling elite. Similarly, Dinar argued

that the demolition of the heritage buildings left Tatar intellectuals pessimistic about the

likelihood of change and stopped them from further involvement in civil society. During the

reconstruction of the Kazan historical centre, buildings that were crucial to Tatar culture, such as

the hotel where the famous Tatar poet Tukai had lived, were destroyed. Unsurprisingly, the

construction company that demolished the historical centre to build high-end downtown

properties had tight connections with the ruling elite. The pervasiveness of corruption

discouraged civic activism; there was no massive opposition for people knew it was pointless.

Lilia noted the following in her narrative:

> LILIA: And the people were silent. Well, yes, certain artists … did speak [against it] but
>
> no one went to protest [this decision] …. And actually, those authorities who forced

people to be tolerant, to tolerate, not to protest when their native homes, buildings, rivers are being destroyed [lost any respect]. Would these people support [Tatarstan's] autonomy? Would they support this government? Of course not.

Ironically, Tatarstan's residents demonstrated a strong dependency on the state bureaucracy in resolving even small problems and a sense of entitlement to have those problems resolved without their direct involvement. The government's presence in every aspect of public and sometimes private life discouraged people from taking any initiative, and it is affirmed in the famous Russian saying, "every initiative is punishable." According to my respondents, Tatarstan citizens were confused about the role of the state combined with the role of civil society. They delegated all responsibility for the public sphere to government officials. People's dependency on the government became harmful and constraining for civil society, creating an expectation of direct government involvement in any activity beyond the front door. Damir narrated this issue as follows:

DAMIR: [There is no popular] view that I am a civic activist and I understand that a state, any state, even the most powerful one, has no power to do everything, has no money [to do that] … if the light bulb goes off in the hallway he [the Russian person] would never change it. He would complain first to the building's management, then to the city administration, then he can even go to the president, but [he] would never change the light bulb [himself]. Because he'd rather walk all this way and prove that he was right than install a new light bulb and have a lit hallway.

When recruiting support for environmental actions, Ivan found enough people who could follow orders from his CSO yet, very few people were capable of taking the initiative. Ivan articulated that, "And this is … the problem: not having enough active, ready [for action] people who will … make decisions. We are ready, come over, make your own decisions. Not just come to a rally, we are not some sort of a [political] party that needs volunteers. We need leaders really."

Further, civil society activists encountered this mentality when fundraising for their particular causes. Damir successfully funded his projects through a creative fundraising strategy and social entrepreneurship, yet he explained why his organization did not rely on government support instead. He noted that, "It's a common idea [in our country] that everything has to be done by anyone but not me. The public [affairs] have to be run by the public and the public has transformed into the state …. We have been long trying to [change this approach] through different articles, through media, and it doesn't help. It's like hitting your head against the wall. Unbelievable."

Nevertheless, the majority of the study participants believed that people's dependency on government was a learned mentality connected to political culture and education, rather than an inherent quality of Russian people. Hence, the dysfunctional elements of this mentality could be transformed through civic education and a changing political culture. Karina pointed out that, "Our people are not stupid … as some tend to believe. People understand what is going on. They know when their rights are being violated, and this gets clearly manifested in society."

Lastly, while remaining critical of the government's role, Semyon suggested that changes were needed on both sides. This is what he had to say on the issue:

SEMYON: I think this is a two-way street, as I see it. Because, on the one hand, we can criticize the state as much as we want, any state really, it doesn't matter. Any state always … aims at expansion. It aims to control everything …. On the other hand, this [the initiative] has to come bottom-up. If this process is lacking, there is not movement this way, or at least this channel is very narrow, how can we blame the government if the people, in general, take no initiative?

The research participants suggested that Tatars did not trust the government, however, they rarely took ownership of actions to challenge the status quo through civic action. The respondents explained the low public engagement in CSOs because of people's dependency on government and their specific mentality, often referred to as a "Soviet mentality." To increase the effectiveness of civil society, it was, thus, crucial to transform the attitudes of the population. Nonetheless, the research participants were skeptical about the power of CSOs to increase participation without wider structural and systemic changes in the society.

Discussions and findings

The study participants' experiences of civic engagement illustrate several key trends of local participation in Tatarstan. Five key findings emerged from the data.

Discrepancies in assessing public participation in CSOs. The interviews revealed the reluctance of Tatarstan's residents to engage in formal CSOs on a regular basis, which is in line with the opinion polls (see, for example, Levada Center, 2018). Overall, the study participants suggested that people's participation in civil society activities in Tatarstan was often limited to informal civil society groups and social issues. They considered public participation in CSOs

crucial to building an effective civil society in Tatarstan and were concerned with the low participation rate in some civil society projects.

Despite the fact that all of the study participants were concerned about the low level of public support for civic initiatives, the political activists experienced greater obstacles in attracting support than the independent or socially oriented activists. They explained that this was the result of both government repressions and the passivity of the population. In contrast, the majority of the socially oriented study participants were more affected by the quality of the participation and they argued for an increase in meaningful and continuous public engagement rather than the existing ad hoc volunteering. The representatives of the pro-state CSOs were overall contented with the participation rates in their organizations. However, they also belonged to the civil society niche that had benefitted from the rise in volunteerism in Tatarstan. The independent activists were in the most insecure situation, experiencing both high participation in several projects and struggling to use this momentum to expand their activities.

At the same time, several respondents suggested that regional participation was higher than the polls showed, and they believed that the polls did not reflect the situation on the ground as they focused mostly on protest activity, rather than other types of civic activism. The socially oriented and independent activists expressed this opinion, whereas political activists criticized regional participation because it was much lower than in Moscow. These ambivalent opinions about public participation could be potentially explained by its different understanding among the study participants. In my guiding questions, I did not impose any definition of public participation (*uchastie naseleniia*), leaving the study participants with an opportunity to share their understandings and experiences of participation. Consequently, when speaking about participation in CSOs, the political study participants implied people's participation in political

rallies, while the socially oriented activists distinguished between participation in their events and the financial support they sought through charitable donations. The independent participants spoke broadly about Tatarstan's people's participation in CSOs, including protest activities, working in the nonprofit sector professionally, as well as contributing to charities.

Although all of my study participants recognized that meaningful participation was an essential element of civil society activism, their approaches to defining it produced differing results. The disagreement about what types of public participation are important also led to the debate about the tools needed to attract wider participation and to include a broader discussion of people's mentality.

Online vs. in-person participation. People's participation in CSOs exhibited some deep-rooted features that overlapped with the general trends of civil society participation migrating to online platforms. On the one hand, all of the study participants perceived that the Internet, and social media in particular, was fundamental in promoting Tatarstan's civil society. They emphasized the power of the Internet as the main, and often the only, critical space to raise people's awareness and to increase support for civil society initiatives. On the other hand, the activists pointed out the divide between participation in real life scenarios and over social media. They highlighted the gap between people's declared interest in civil society initiatives and their real-life engagement in Tatarstan's CSOs.

The imbalance between the online and real-life participation in political protests is not unique to Tatarstan, however, in contrast to other post-Soviet contexts (such as, for example, Ukraine or Georgia) social media activism did not result in any significant mass mobilization in Russia, which stands out as the case where grassroots participation through social media had the least impact on broader anti-regime protests. Even by Russian standards, Tatarstan has had lower

real-life mobilization compared to Moscow during the Bolotnaya protests of 2011-2012 or the election protests during the summer of 2019.

This study has offered several explanations for this trend. The most obvious stressed by the study participants was that being an online follower took significantly less effort and was lower risk than participating in real-life protest. In some way, Tatarstan's social media has replaced the so-called kitchen talk of Soviet times, when people discussed politically unsafe topics behind the closed doors of their homes. The low effect and impact of the online strategy reflected this specific culture, in which people did not want to engage in an open debate.

In addition to people's self-withdrawal from active participation in civil society, Tatarstan's CSOs were less strategic about the use of communication tools. Despite their active online engagement with the population, the study participants did not consider social media as a tool to foment social change rather they treated it as a communication and marketing tool.

The different branches of civil society held different attitudes about the online tools used for grassroots mobilization. Political activists used social media for increasing public support and in marketing their various causes to the active Internet users. In 2011/2012, the protestors for the first time made a strategic decision to use social media to promote social change. However, the censorship of the Runet[44] prevented political activists from advancing their online presence. While their mobilization strategy was largely imposed by government restrictions, the political study participants also chose their online mobilization strategy consciously to attract a new generation of politically active citizens. Conversely, socially oriented and independent activists saw the Internet as an important but supplementary tool in their activism. Their online strategy reflected the differences in understanding participation by the socially oriented activists that

[44] The Russian-language community of the Internet.

looked for financial and volunteer support online but could not attract continuous participation. Whenever possible, they tried to engage with their target groups in-person, which allowed them to engage people outside of the social media.

Overall, most activists remained uncritical of the online tools they used. Socially oriented activists underestimated the heavy monitoring and censorship of the Runet; political activists considered the Runet users sheepish and ignored them, focusing their attention on YouTube and Facebook users. The narrower focus was often necessary for the overworked activists to conserve energy and motivation. However, the focus on fewer online platforms limited the political CSOs' audience.

Key reasons to participate in CSOs. Public support for Tatarstan's CSOs and independent civic groups depended on the issues they promoted. The study participants provided examples of successful public engagement and suggested possible reasons for both the positive and negative experiences of popular support for CSOs. The activists named personal fulfillment as a common reason for individuals' participation in CSOs. In particular, it appeared to be the main motive for engaging in socially oriented youth organizations or sports volunteering. For the people in their 30s and older, the more common participation stimuli were related to the worsening conditions of life (economic, environmental). Empathy was also a motivator for this group, although it applied selectively to the cases of wanting to help ill children or stray animals. Empathy as a key motivation to volunteer is consistent with other political settings (e.g., Frumkin, 2005).

Conversely, the most unpopular civil society issues were either the causes to which the people could not relate (for instance, if they happened too far away from home) or (unlike sports volunteerism) did not provide them instant gratification from the participation. Organizations and

groups working with marginalized communities were highly unpopular. Still, the most powerful motivation was the proximity of the issue to the individual. With the exception of small neighbourhood initiatives, only the direct impact of the issue on the lives of people encouraged them to participate in CSOs.

Although most of the study participants recognized that public participation in civil society initiatives was overall low, they disagreed about the reasons why certain types of civic activism attracted wider support and what lessons could be learned from these experiences. Both the citizens' low trust of CSOs in Tatarstan and increased participation in CSOs by volunteers did not find a unified explanation as well. I believe that many features of civil society participation could be explained by the government's policies promoting one type of civic activism over others, and the rise in youth volunteerism in Tatarstan was largely due to this regional policy. However, the trust of certain types of CSOs was less related to their reputation and government support and more to the issues they represented. As a result, CSOs promoting unpopular causes stood fewer chances of attracting meaningful public support. The extreme individualism of Tatarstan's residents, which was highlighted by the study participants, was also related to the fact that even when people in Tatarstan independently chose a cause to support, they were unable to identify themselves with most of the long-term civil society initiatives.

Participation among various age groups. Participation trends among different age groups and the discrepancies between online and real-life participation reflected the dominant civil society strategy to recruit younger people. The study participants did not agree on the value of participation among various age groups. Independent activists were the only group that unanimously agreed on the value of recruiting middle-aged and older people. Political activists

and many socially oriented participants argued that since participation was higher among younger people (in their late teens to mid-twenties), they had to focus on recruiting them.

Indeed, young people are more active in political CSOs in Tatarstan and Russia in general. Similarly, young people are active in the pro-government youth-led CSOs. Nevertheless, older people are becoming increasingly active in Tatarstan's civil society sphere, especially by donating to CSOs. This group of the population is less likely to donate online, and either donate in-person or via text messages in response to TV ads. Older people are also willing to volunteer, although there are fewer (mostly, faith-based) organizations that recruit them. My study participants mentioned only a few cases of engaging older people in their recruitment tactics, among faith-based CSOs, several independent activists, and a new volunteer movement that had been specifically organized for older people. Middle-aged citizens also remained underrepresented, in particular, in political CSOs and pro-state socially oriented organizations. The political study participants suggested that the reason was that it was an expression of this group's passive and state-dependent mentality, while the socially oriented and independent activists believed in economic reasons for the low popular support in this age group. I believe that both explanations are valid; economic hardships alone do not account for the reluctance to participate in political CSOs, considering that this age group was active in other civil society initiatives.

Another reason for the differences in participation among various age groups was the recruitment strategies of Tatarstan's CSOs. By focusing on younger people, CSOs in Tatarstan did not capitalize on the resources available to other population groups. The use of online tools for recruiting support also showed that different CSOs purposely chose to represent certain groups of the population. The tactical use of social media suggested they focused on the younger

generation; in the case of political activists even more so, as they distanced themselves from the Runet due to both government censorship and by their own choice. The strategy to mobilize youth spoke to the aspiration of Tatarstan's civil society groups to promote healthy attitudes to civic participation earlier in life, yet youth engagement did not result in consistent civil society engagement later in life. Although young people were faster to mobilize, most lost interest in participating in civil society initiatives after graduating from colleges and universities.

"Russian mentality" argument. The research participants attributed decreasing participation among middle-aged and older adults to the specific mentality of Russian citizens. Their argument was supported by the case of Tatarstan's youth organizations, however, it did not explain the increasing number of informal civic groups that were beginning to emerge in Tatarstan. The study participants believed that cultural limitations prevented people in Tatarstan from actively participating in civil society, in particular, in the CSOs advocating for political transformation. My respondents overwhelmingly argued that dependency on government was a part of the "Russian mentality," and suggested that the problem of recruiting steady support for smaller neighbourhood initiatives demonstrated this national mentality.

Paradoxically, government dependency and extreme individualism within Tatarstan's population were described as two sides of the same coin. Tatarstan's people were tired of excessive government involvement and distrusted political institutions and bureaucrats. Nonetheless, they also learned to rely on the government in every aspect of their lives and were unwilling to take the initiative to change the institutions. The research participants believed that these attitudes were too deeply ingrained in the local mentality and were difficult to challenge. Indeed, historically, any grassroots political participation in Russia was unsafe, which stimulated the development of certain political values among people, such as submission to authority,

distrust of civic participation and of one's own capacity to foster change. The infamous Russian saying "if you want to live peacefully, keep low" highlights these attitudes, which continue to impact people's choices of whether to participate in civil society or not. These values also reflect the deep-rooted elements of culture that can be difficult to challenge.

At the same time, the mentality argument leaves little space for the expressions of people's individual agency and it does not explain why this agency is expressed in certain types of civil society initiatives. The phenomenon of "Soviet mentality" is grounded in ideology and political practice rather than being intrinsic to all Russian people (see Sharafutdinova, 2019). Tatarstan's case supports this conclusion. The study participants often used people's mentality as the only explanation of civic inactivity and did not attempt to critically evaluate people's agency. When they witnessed cases of individual activism outside of their immediate circle of familiar activists, they were caught by surprise and attributed those acts to a lucky coincidence or the bravery of individuals, who were capable of breaking free from their "Soviet mentality." Overall, the focus on mentality prevented civil society activists from developing an alternative approach to understanding those unexpected expressions of agency and capitalizing on them. To challenge the unfavourable cultural norms that have led to the development of a specific ideology, it is important to recognize the agency of local people and advance CSOs' recruitment strategies beyond the practices that proved to be insufficient in attracting local support.

CSOs' mistakes in engaging the local population. The two preceding conclusions intersect with the last finding. Not only have the authorities ignored the agency of the people but many of Tatarstan's civil society groups have also underestimated it. The study participants confirmed that people's local knowledge seldom impacted governance. This happened both due to the lack of reliable instruments to communicate CSOs' knowledge to the authorities and the

existence of ineffective communication strategies with the local population in which people's agency was rarely taken into consideration. Although the first remained the major obstacle, the latter also limited CSOs' perspective on the role of local people in civil society and isolated many CSOs from the population. Only a few independent and socially oriented research participants provided examples of their projects that were initiated by the representatives of their target groups, whereas the majority of the study participants struggled to describe the influence of their target groups on their organization. Some activists, at best, asked their clients for feedback yet did not consider engaging them in the earlier stages of authoring the CSOs' agendas.

Political activists, in particular, expressed less interest in engaging people in the earlier stages of developing their programs and strategies. Many embraced the idea that activists were the only "normal" people in the society, while the rest of the population was described as "the herd," "vegetables," and other demeaning terms were used to refer to people's inactivity. Respondents from political CSOs argued that they were well aware of local needs as they themselves were a part of this population. Although occasionally Kazan's residents approached political CSOs to share their grievances with them and ask them for legal support, generally they were not questioned about their opinion of the future of these organizations. A study participant from a political CSO, Marat, suggested that political activists "got separated" from the people, and did not seek their opinion. This separation has created tensions and lowered people's trust with regards to political CSOs among Tatarstan's residents, and encouraged the same political practice of ignoring people's opinion that these political CSOs were trying to challenge in the first place.

On the other side of the civil society spectrum, the pro-state organizations received their agenda from the government agencies and consulted with their target groups on minor operational matters. This was less the case for Tatarstan's grassroots socially oriented CSOs that had freedom to include their target groups as active co-authors of their organizational vision. Several socially oriented activists claimed that they were successful in engaging their target groups yet they had experienced difficulties when engaging the broader population. Only independent activists asserted that their target groups meaningfully contributed to authoring strategies for their groups. They argued that their groups emerged to represent the local population and their main goal was to translate the local knowledge to the policy level.

Although not all of the CSOs were concerned with finding new ways to meaningfully engage their target groups, they all witnessed discouraging results from their recruitment practices. By their mid-twenties, the majority of civic activists in Tatarstan quit working for CSOs, as they had few opportunities to grow within these organizations and impact their strategies. The decline in civic engagement later in life best illustrates the impact of disillusioned young people distancing themselves from the local population.

From the beginning, the pro-government CSOs' youth recruitment strategy was not aimed at supporting the youth's agency. Government strategies to popularize voluntary organizations attracted more young people to pro-state organizations and channeled youth activism by offering instant gratification from participation, such as visiting popular sports events. Later, youth became alienated from civic participation because they were unable to influence civil society agenda. Grigory's story of disengagement from several government-supported organizations illustrated how the restrictions on authoring and implementing civic initiatives had undermined the credibility of those NGOs. Considering their dependency on

government funding, these organizations could not aspire to transform their strategies unless they diversified their funding sources.

At the same time, the needs of young people were often overlooked by other CSOs when authoring their goals and strategies. The reasons youth joined political organizations in Russia were mostly socio-economic, such as unemployment. Thus, without including possible solutions to their social and economic concerns into their programs, political organizations lost many supporters when university graduates joined the workforce and started families. Political activists also spoke to strong political leadership. They complemented youth on their participation in CSOs, arguing for a top-down approach to local ownership with a charismatic leader at the top and young active volunteers promoting his agenda at the bottom. This approach to restrict the youth's role in CSOs widened the gap between volunteer participation in political action and long-term engagement in civil society. As Ivan pointed out in his interview, civil society activists could not emerge merely from following a charismatic leader.

Conclusion

This chapter investigated key features of local participation in Tatarstan's civil society sector. The participants' experiences of recruiting public support for civil society groups and organizations suggested that Tatarstan's citizens supported initiatives that had the potential to bring change to their immediate surroundings. The population remained more active online than in person due both to its learned mentality and to the recruitment practices of civil society activists, which were partially responsible for differences in the representation of various age groups in CSOs. Civil society activists acknowledged that the public should inform the work of

civil society organizations, yet not all of them used the feedback they received to reflect the needs of their target groups, and to transform their work accordingly.

The interviewees shared their insights on local participation that now stimulates the need to discuss the measures necessary to overcome these deficiencies. Therefore, the next chapter focuses on envisioning the future for Tatarstan's civil society. This vision, if developed further, can shed light on building a stronger framework for civil society's role in governance and political transformation.

Chapter 8

Envisioning the future of Tatarstan's civil society

Introduction

The previous chapters discussed the positive and negative experiences of civil society

activists, their relations with other society sectors, and the cooperation within Tatarstan's civil

society sector. Recent political and economic developments in the republic, and Russia in

general, left many study participants searching for possible solutions to the problems they had

encountered. Civic activists had to be able to address these issues by envisioning a future where

civil society could play a more meaningful role in political transformation and governance, and

having a commitment to developing appropriate strategies to foster this change.

It is critically important to develop a multidimensional approach to change. Rather than

applying fast solutions, PACS researchers have looked beneath the surface whether it is to

understand the multiple interconnected sources of conflicts (for example, social cubism [Byrne

& Nadan, 2011]) or the causes of violence (for example, structural violence [Galtung, 1969,

1990]). They have further argued that constructive change is possible only when it happens at all

levels (personal, relational, structural, and cultural), whereas upholding the sustainability of this

transformation requires simultaneously dismantling formal and informal restraints on peace and

equity across the human network (Lederach, 2010) to target both structures and relationships

(Van Tuijl, 2016). At the same time, the complexity of social systems convolutes the prediction

of outcomes and impels continuous adaptation of any transformation to the local conditions (De

Coning, 2018). Above all else, society needs to develop a vision and long-term commitment to

change (Lederach, 2010).

The study participants had very different (and at times conflicting) views on the potential

transformation of civil society's role in governance. However, they all argued for the need for constructive change and they offered practical directions in which it could happen. The respondents also confirmed the necessity of having a multi-layered approach to change and suggested that transformation was needed within the civil society sector itself, in its relations with the population and, more importantly, in state – civil society relations.

In addition, civic activists realized that sustainable change would be impossible without including other actors. The local population is essential in challenging power relations (Chinn, 2013; Engler & Engler, 2014; Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2013; Nepstad, 2013; Sharp, 2010). The study participants had witnessed the power of people coming together to protest government decisions, forcing the authorities to make concessions. However, the people only become a force for change when they realize their agency and participate in authoring transformation on equal terms (Donais, 2012, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2014; Richmond, 2011b). The role of civil society in this process is not in manipulating people but in empowering them (Van Tuijl, 2016), being mindful that these empowerment strategies are not, in fact, upholding the same power structures as has often happened in liberal models (Kjellman & Harpviken, 2010) but instead they are addressing structural violence by generating social change (Özerdem & Lee, 2016).

No less important are the relations with the state where civil society could have a twofold mission. First, CSOs could impact political transformation by connecting the grassroots to the top level, and leveraging the local knowledge (Lederach, 1997, 2010). Although civil society is not a panacea for change (Paffenholz, 2014), it can network strategically to build relationships within and across sectors to strengthen grassroots support for transformation (Lederach, 2010). Second, if civil society is to engage in a long-term sustainable change process, it has to develop and implement its vision of governance. Civil society "has helped to shape parameters of

political power" (Cortright, Greenberg, Stone, & Milovanovic, 2016, p. 231) and it continues shaping the governing structures in their current framework. The pre-conditions for civil society participation in governance in such challenging environments include the empowerment of these organizations, their independence, acceptance by local people, and freedom (Schirch, 2016), as well as acquiring practical experience in public policy advocacy and delivery.

The final set of interview questions focused on the future of Tatarstan's civil society. In particular, I asked civil society activists what they would change about Tatarstan's civil society if they could. The majority of study participants kept their proposals down to earth and strategized based on their previous conclusions. Several participants representing pro-state organizations initially asserted that no change was needed. However, after contemplating the question further, they carefully offered solutions to problems within their own organizations. They were unwilling to confront government decisions so that they soon established that many of their practical solutions depended on their relations with government agencies. Although I prompted them with guiding questions, I clarified that they did not have to answer any question if they felt uncomfortable with it. Thus, all the research participants arrived at their conclusions independently and their visions for the civil society sector represented in this chapter are authentic to those Tatarstan civic activists.

As a result of the analysis of the themes outlined by the study participants, this chapter examines the areas of potential transformation in the following sectors: (1) changes within the civil society sector; (2) the improved role of civil society in governance; (3) changes required from the government in these processes; and (4) the capacity of civil society to increase public support for transformation. In addition, the proposed changes follow up on the discussions arising from the previous chapters.

Civil society sector transformation

Multiple stakeholders must be included in designing the civil society agenda in order to address the challenges of the (neo)liberal civil society model. Advocacy, service-provision, and other civil society functions are equally important (Paffenholz, 2010; Spurk, 2010). All civil society groups and organizations have a unique role to play, in particular, if we understand civil society as a dynamic process and a continuous work in progress (Cory, 2010). The effective promotion of social cohesion and other key civil society functions largely depends on the inclusion of all civil society actors, their cooperation on equal terms (Taylor-Gooby, 2012) and the support to local institutions (De Coning, 2018). Consequently, locally-based informal groups may be more representative of the local population than the liberal NGOs (Spurk, 2010). In addition, civil society needs to have the capacity to formulate a joint strategy within the sector (Phillips, 2007) to then develop a mutually reinforcing strategy for collaboration between the state, civil society, and the private sector (Levasseur, 2014).

Previous chapters discussed the disconnection between Tatarstan's civil society actors, namely, between the independent groups, socially oriented and political organizations. Overcoming this disconnection could increase civil society's capacity in political transformation and governance. The study participants admitted that without building partnerships among civil society groups and organizations, Tatarstan's civil society would not be able to withstand government pressure and fulfill its major functions. Therefore, they argued in favour of promoting cooperation within the civil society sector. According to Svetlana, support and knowledge of each other's work would initiate more effective civil society collaboration. Primarily, this cooperation must include sharing scarce resources. Lilia echoed Svetlana's idea in the following manner:

LILIA: … [we should] be able to chip in. In other words, if there is a problem, it could be sometimes resolved financially or a [negative] decision could be blocked financially. And it's not huge money …. In other words, civil society [activists] need to trust each other. When you understand that your values are similar to the rest of us, you can give them, maybe very little, but you still can. And you can ask [for help] .… And this exchange essentially replicates the public system and creates its own value system.

Having expressed her vision for civil society cooperation, Lilia, however, noted that Tatarstan's civic activists were not ready to embrace such a mutual support system. Fanis seconded her opinion and connected the lack of cohesion among civil society groups to Russian mentality in general. This is what he had to say on the issue:

FANIS: Individualism is very strong in our culture, odd as it may seem. In other words, our society, our culture is extremely collectivistic [and] the state is actually paternalistic. Yet, if you start digging, everyone cares only about himself … currently, activists in Tatarstan, [in] Kazan are very divided, and we don't know the methods and techniques of bringing them together.

Despite declaring the need to be more inclusive and look beyond the socially oriented vs. political organizations' divide, activists could not agree on the terms that could help them to accomplish this collaboration. Most of the socially oriented organizations and independent groups believed that cooperating with political organizations might harm their cause so that they

were unable to serve their clients. Although independent activists had united with political organizations occasionally, they argued that political slogans often distracted attention from their own agenda, such as a clean environment. Further, the affiliation with an opposition group posed a threat of potential criminal persecution of independent groups' supporters, and independent activists were reluctant to expose their supporters to harsh treatment from the government.

In contrast, socially oriented organizations could not survive entirely outside the government infrastructure. For instance, the organizations working in HIV prevention advocated for correcting the deficiencies of the national healthcare system, and ending discrimination against HIV positive people. Their clients, however, needed medical attention and had to rely on the state's healthcare institutions. As a result, collaboration with the medical institutions and the Ministry of Health was unavoidable for these socially oriented organizations, and the respondents felt that politicizing their agenda could harm these relationships. Similarly, activists working with former offenders had to establish working relations with the Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Penitentiary Service to support their clients.

In turn, many political activists believed that socially oriented organizations and independent groups had to develop a stronger political stance to become worthy of attention, let alone cooperation. Grigory reported on this issue in the following manner:

GRIGORY: We are now the only ones who are against Putin, [the only ones] who do something. And it turns out that we are the only ones who have a solid position, [the only] civic activists. Well, unfortunately, civil society does not accept us. Many people think that there is no opposition in the country, [that] Navalny is Putin's project.

The pro-state organizations remained a special case. Although they confirmed the need for cooperation in general terms, they did not elaborate on their potential cooperation mechanisms with the nonprofit organizations outside of their immediate realm, which excluded political, independent, and some socially oriented organizations. Within the circle of pro-state organizations, activists working on related issues often competed with each other for government funding. This rivalry was more typical for pro-government organizations that served similar target groups. For instance, Marina who represented one of these organizations explained the issue as follows:

> MARINA: The biggest difficulty in Kazan for us is that there is a lot of events for youth …. In fact, they [the youth] are not ready to seriously commit to any issue …. The question of competition is actually very difficult, you know, the quantity doesn't always mean quality. And we really try to find our folks, who would be interested to work all the time, not just come to have fun. In other words, it's really important for us.

Another dimension to increasing network capacity discussed by my study participants relates to collaboration with civic activists in other Russian regions. Many interviewees networked with civil society groups and organizations beyond Tatarstan. This cooperation often produced positive and even breakthrough results in their projects. Political activists belonged to the branches of federal extra-parliamentary parties and organizations; this assisted their cooperation with political organizations across Russia's regions. Socially oriented activists were occasionally invited to participate in various national events through government-sponsored

organizations and forums. Independent activists also connected with the activists in other regions to learn from their experiences or to share advice and offer help.

Despite the fact that this study focuses on Tatarstan, the research participants suggested that there was certain interconnectedness among civil society activists and organizations in Russia within the sub-sectors. The cooperation between the regions was promoted both vertically through government-sponsored forums or federal political organizations and horizontally through individual trustbuilding and mutual support networks. In particular, independent activists shared specific examples of the latter, however, usually off-record to protect the identities of the non-Tatarstan activists who were a part of those mutual support networks.

The CSOs dependency on the government's budget was identified in Chapter 6 as a significant obstacle for the civil society sector's development and collaboration. The overreliance on government grants prevented many organizations from developing a viable funding strategy. In the Volga federal district45, the top three funding sources for socially oriented CSOs are charitable donations, private companies' donations and federal grants. Regional budgets contribute significantly to less funding to CSOs. In Tatarstan, however, regional funding to CSOs (socially oriented) equals federal funding and charitable donations ("NGO statistics," 2019). Federally, the top three income sources for the socially oriented CSOs are charitable donations, user fees and private companies' donations (Mersiianova, 2016). This makes Tatarstan stand out as a case of unusually high funding from the regional government to socially oriented CSOs.

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45 This sub-region includes 14 neighbouring federal subjects: Republic of Bashkortostan, Kirov Oblast, Mari El Republic, Republic of Mordovia, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, Orenburg Oblast, Penza Oblast, Perm Krai, Samara Oblast, Saratov Oblast, Republic of Tatarstan, Udmurt Republic, Ulyanovsk Oblast, Chuvash Republic.

Many research participants also suggested that the funding strategy often played them one against the other in a competitive system. As Damir pointed out, it was common to register nonprofit organizations specifically to apply for a grant and discontinue their activities after running out of funding. He believed that only 20 percent out of the over 5,000 registered nonprofits in Tatarstan worked "systemically," meaning that they collaborated with their target group, had a strategy for sustainable development (including funding) and were flexible in transforming it when necessary. These organizations were created not out of curiosity but with a commitment to long-term service.

To tackle government dependency and resentment over the funding sources, several study participants argued that CSOs needed to develop independent funding strategies. Damir's organization, for instance, promoted social entrepreneurship. Marina believed in the importance of cooperation with the private sector, although admitting that her colleagues lacked professional skills to search for alternative funding sources. Political activists mentioned the efficiency of crowd funding. However, all these funding strategies had their limitations and civil society activists could use no single instrument across the sub-sectors.

In addition, activists advocated for the transparency of government funding, which relates mostly to socially oriented organizations. The regulation mechanisms of government grants were confusing and often corrupt, urging civic activists to compete against each other in an unfair game where they had no impact over the rules. Damir identified the need for more transparent and easier ways to navigate the grant-making process:

DAMIR: I would've given free access to those [government] resources that are already available … if we could change [the grant-making process] and make this mechanism

open and transparent or, at least, [guarantee] the access of all civil society organizations

to the resources that the state has, it would be a huge step forward …. The state has to be

more transparent in making those decisions.

CSOs could also benefit from becoming more transparent in their own decisions. Chapter

7 illustrated that many civic activists had had difficulties in cooperating with the population

owing to government repression and to their own inability to make information accessible to

everyone. The distrust of CSOs partially explained the low level of grassroots support for civil

society initiatives. A lot of this distrust emerged from the Soviet era civil society model (see

Ljubownikow, Crotty, & Rodgers, 2013) where voluntary work was obligatory.

Although public suspicion was often not based on facts, in some instances it was

connected to the general lack of knowledge about civil society among the population. When the

grassroots saw civic activists join government structures or receive debatable funding it shaped

their biases against CSOs. According to Egor, "those people, who lead civic initiatives, they then

end up with money and start their own biased politics." On a more general note, Karina criticized

civil society activists that had no established agenda or as she called them – "the fighters for all

the good and against all the bad." She believed that the CSOs' lack of focus coupled with the

general public's lack of knowledge often diluted civil society efforts in promoting their cause.

The study participants argued for the need to develop transparency and accountability

mechanisms, and to have well-defined goals in order to overcome the distrust of the population.

The issues of accountability and effective fundraising were tightly connected to the

knowledge deficiency within the civil society sector. Civil society activists argued that they met

various obstacles in advancing their expertise. For example, Idris argued that civic activists

needed more opportunities to advance their nonprofit management skills: Idris reported that, "We need to find an educational system … civic activists lack deep knowledge. They can rise up and reach far, and when you go deeper into the topic, it gets hard. And the activist may give up because of the bureaucracy [s/he] doesn't understand."

The research participants affirmed that they had limited practical knowledge of their work when they had just started, as well as little support to increase it. In her interview, Marina acknowledged that the members of her team initially had no practical experience, figuring things out empirically by trial and error. Another activist, Lilia, completed an additional formal educational program when she realized her team needed more professional environmental scientists. These individual efforts by civil society activists led to positive change, although often at the expense of the activists. Civil society activists volunteered their time (and often money) to share their knowledge with fellow activists in other Russian regions.

The study participants believed that more independent training opportunities in nonprofit management could improve the overall expertise of Tatarstan's civil society sector. As the civil society sector professionalizes, there are now various professional development courses provided to civil society activists. The study participants mentioned the training on grant application provided by the Public Chamber to socially oriented NGO workers and other local training opportunities on the basics of nonprofit management, for instance, provided by the House of Friendship. Unsurprisingly, activists from the pro-state organizations benefitted the most from these training sessions through government-affiliated institutions. Several independent nonprofit organizations provided training and support to civil society activists regardless of their affiliation. However, according to my research participants, most of these resources were located

in Moscow. Hence, the activists continued to encounter difficulties in advancing their skill sets and knowledge outside of their immediate practical expertise.

Civil society in governance

Political transformation in Russia has always come from above (Tsygankov, 2014). Even when the need for political transformation was recognized by the population, soon thereafter, the political elite appropriated the results similar to what happened during Russia's transition to neoliberalism (Rutland, 2013). In contrast, local ownership theorists (see Byrne & Thiessen, 2019; Donais, 2012, 2015; Mac Ginty, 2014; Richmond, 2011b; Shinoda, 2015; Thiessen, 2011) argue that change that comes from below has the potential for more sustainable results. An overwhelming number of the research participants advocated for bottom-up transformation of the civil society's role in governance. They argued that activists must become an integral part of the governing process to impact policy development and implementation. The study participants proposed several practical mechanisms for integrating the civil society perspective into policymaking. They contended that the existing mechanisms for cooperation with government could be used with caution. To illustrate this point, Fanis noted that CSOs could be more persistent in pressuring the authorities. This is what he had to say on the issue:

> FANIS: We [civil society] do not have enough stamina and determination to act. Could we act within the existing legal framework, a ridiculous [and] wrong framework, but nonetheless? Yes, we could. Can we? Right now, we get tired very fast. To me, it is quite obvious that any changes in the political [and] in civil society fields will happen, but we will have to sweat them out.

The Public Chamber and public councils were named as the main instruments for the CSOs to communicate with the authorities. The research participants pointed out the advisory status and unequal representation within these structures, and they also recognized the capacity of these institutions to develop. With all of their shortcomings, public councils could be an effective tool for civil society activists if the councils engaged in socially meaningful projects. Legally, public councils were entitled to advise government structures on various issues, including the development of legislation and monitoring policy implementation. In practice, their functions were reduced to auxiliary questions.

Several research participants mentioned public councils as a potential instrument for increasing civil society's role in governance, and the necessity of facilitating a continuous ideas exchange between civil society and government agencies. For example, when developing or implementing an environmental program, the government must consult all significant environmentalist organizations and informal groups. Despite the fact that public councils have no decision-making power, they could still impact policy development through advising on the areas of their expertise. Unlike the Public Chamber, these public councils were more inclusive and consisted only of civil society activists. They embraced even small-scale initiatives and reached far beyond Tatarstan's large cities. To illustrate his point, Idris argued that every government body should consult with public councils:

IDRIS: I think that we could just give real meaning to public councils, right? So, that a public council would really consist of people with different opinions … and that these councils participated in discussions of some initiatives … Right now, they [the councils]

exist around the republic, but usually, they don't do real things. They can run a *subbotnik*, but that's it. Public councils should deal with the issues the government is discussing.

At the same time, existing state – civil society cooperation instruments raised controversies among the research participants. On the one hand, these mechanisms transmitted advice and shared the hands-on experience of civic activists with government officials. The same mechanisms, however, restrained civic activists from advancement. Karim, a socially oriented activist, considered the cooperation tools with the government, such as the Public Chamber, as a viable instrument. Yet, he argued that the rules and limitations imposed on CSOs within those structures deprived them of freedom and creativity:

> KARIM: There is nothing wrong for the government to actively collaborate … with activists. But they [the government] shouldn't discourage activists all the time, shouldn't deter them, [and] lock them up in one room … There is no sense in having activists like that, when they … are locked inside one room and are playing one game …. An activist has to move on, he needs to try, make mistakes, even destroy something … and then bring in techniques to improve people's lives.

Several study participants claimed that the advisory functions of the public councils and the Public Chamber were insufficient in advancing the civil society agenda. To strengthen civil society, they aspired to be included in the decision-making process. In Tatarstan, experienced civil society activists were equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to promote their cause on the political level. Civic activism provided them with expertise in policy analysis and

development. The research participants who represented organizations with a political agenda, in particular, supported the idea of civil society being a space for socializing and educating new politicians and public servants. Vadim, a member of a political CSO, asserted that civil society activists could transform the political system if they were allowed to enter it:

> VADIM: In fact, new politicians would have this [civil society] background. They [activists] are the new politicians. Ideally, they should then become … municipal, then regional, then federal parliament members. Someone may become a minister [and] work in the government. Someone would become a city mayor … a governor ... a president. In other words, the future statespersons would originate from the socially and politically active part of the population.

Independent activists largely agreed with political activists about the urgency of including civil society into political decision-making. However, they suggested that the advantage of civil society was in holding governments accountable externally, rather than from within. Independent civic activists joined government structures, hoping they could make a difference, but they were too few to significantly impact the governance structure. To transform the system, Lilia argued, that there had to be at least 60 percent of civic activists in the government. Since this was impossible, activists were assimilated into the prevailing political culture. Moreover, by joining government agencies, civil society was deprived of its most qualified and outspoken members who were coopted into the political system. According to independent activists, civil society had to provide an independent opinion and alternative concepts for social development, rather than merging with the government structures.

Although they believed in civil society playing a key role in political transformation, independent activists argued that civic activists must maintain their impartiality. The rotation within the civil society sector and the alternation of political power were both deemed necessary to guarantee the effectiveness of change. Above all, independent activists believed that their moral advantage would get lost if they joined political structures. Hence, Lilia asserted that, "Any system, no matter how great it is, will later become a dragon; a dragon fighter becomes a dragon. In other words, it [the system] may fail. And when you know that there is an ethical system, which lives inside people and which works … you will do your job, then transfer it to someone else, help him to get settled, and quietly move on to do something else."

Tatarstan's civil society political spectrum was reluctant to suggest in-between solutions and argued for the uncompromising change of the political regime before developing any civil society strategy. Vadim argued that, "Our goal … is to pull the country out of where it got itself hundred years ago … and get it onto European civilization track …. With all its potential, our country will become a world leader, in other words, it has to be equal to the U.S., China … and now it is a third world country."

The EU countries' political and economic models were seen as aspiring examples to emulate. Should political transformation fail, political activists wished to immigrate to a Western country and quit political activism. Grigory pointed out that, "Actually, it would've been easier to go somewhere and forget about everything. I traveled to Sweden, and two days after [I arrived there] I forgot about politics [because] it is so great living there."

The research participants representing socially oriented and independent groups shared a variety of alternative concepts with me, which they considered to be safer and more efficient than the current practices. These apolitical activists generally agreed with the necessity of

working toward political transformation (or at least they criticized certain practices of the current regime). For example, Karina believed that civil society's lack of alternatives would compromise the sustainability of change. She contended that, "Often, our [political] civil society in Tatarstan … seeks for the most confrontational solutions, in other words, they don't offer their own decisions … [arguing for] something like, let's send everyone to jail. Folks, this wouldn't change anything and your problems won't be resolved."

Overall, the activists remained pessimistic about the prospects for comprehensive transformation of Tatarstan's governance system. Although remaining hopeful about the possibility of political change, these political activists considered immigration as a backup plan B for themselves and their families. They also hoped that the annexation of Crimea, the war with Ukraine, and economic sanctions against Russia might trigger civic activism. Marat noted that, "I still think that there is some benefit from these sanctions. Anyway, people have to get sober one day. Well, now people are not as enthusiastic supporters of the government." However, several socially oriented activists asserted that a change of the government would not change the mentality within the people, and sooner or later any new government would also plunge into corruption. Above all, any qualitative change would require broader public participation, which they did not expect in the nearest future. To illustrate this point, Egor reflected on the issue in the following manner:

EGOR: Some liberal newspapers write that, when pressured by the socioeconomic crisis, people [in Russia] will start demanding political rights. Well, Russian reality doesn't demonstrate that. I think that the shift, which happened during perestroika … will not happen [again]…. People are getting twice, three times poorer but they tolerate it. In

other words, this isn't the moment that will provoke people to take the streets and to pose political demands to the government.

Envisioning civil society's role in governance, the study participants argued for several immediate and long-term solutions. The interim measures included the use of existing communication mechanisms with the authorities and pressuring them to cooperate with CSOs. The majority of my study participants believed, however, that without the inclusion of civil society into the decision-making process and broader political transformation, these provisional measures would remain insufficient to address the current challenges.

The role of the government

While outlining the goals for the advancement of Tatarstan's civil society, activists pointed out that the government still controlled the public sphere. Thus, civic activists faced the dilemma outlined by McCandless (2016) of whether to cooperate with the government to be able to deliver some social services or to stand up and confront it. Unsurprisingly, political and apolitical activists had different positions on the role of Tatarstan's government in the changes they proposed. Socially oriented activists advocated for governmental support for civil society initiatives. They understood support to be both accessible sources of funding and non-monetary assistance.

In addition to the need for transparent funding, the study participants identified several immediate non-monetary needs that the regional government could satisfy. First, socially oriented study participants asserted that cooperation with the government agencies could be instrumental in breaching the knowledge gap identified above if the state provided more

opportunities for training. Another form of support that activists found essential (especially for the small community organizations) was free access to the unused municipal office space. The research participants pointed out that a lot of state property in Kazan and in other cities of the republic remained empty. With some renovations of those spaces, many of which were conveniently located in close proximity to their clientele, CSOs could minimize their rent expenses and expand their programming. Finally, activists sought greater informational support for socially oriented projects. Maxim noted that, "Informational support is actually very important and could be achieved as easy as having a few billboards in the city and having an advertisement in public transportation, and any other instruments that the state has …. It would've been helpful to [us] and any other similar projects, so that, at minimum, they wouldn't need to spend money on the advertisement."

Further, socially oriented research participants saw cooperation between the state and civil society critical to advancing public participation in civil society projects. They believed that the state should be equally interested in broadening public participation in socially oriented projects, and they argued that popular support would, to some extent, relieve government agencies of the responsibility to provide certain social services. For instance, Damir argued that rather than imposing their own view, the state agencies needed to learn from civic activists and provide tools for promoting bottom-up initiatives. He asserted that a broader informational campaign could stimulate a sense of ownership and increase support to socially oriented projects:

DAMIR: I think that the state has to start with some sort of broad informational campaign because only the state can … transform the mentality. [Our state] can do it perfectly well, to work with the mentality [laughs]. So, it has to look at … creating a sense of ownership

… and then there won't be any need in the state's help, if the people start to think this way and help a [civil society] organization."

Regardless of their affiliation the research participants insisted on reducing bureaucracy and increasing the transparency of government decisions. A part of this argument was related to procedural matters, such as, penalizing civil servants for *otpiskas* or *playing football* and ensuring efficient mechanisms to review citizens' appeals. For example, Marat argued that government officials must provide justification for their decisions and base them upon the current economic and social needs of the population. If held accountable for their decisions, he added, government agencies would have to consult with the civil society sector about the situation on the ground.

Although a few research participants highlighted the importance of the officials' personal characteristics, in general, civic activists were more concerned with the nontransparent government structure, which concealed corruption. Similar to the Public Chamber grant allocation's biased mechanism, activists indicated partisan decision-making when offering tax breaks for corporations. This is what Damir had to say on the issue:

DAMIR: The state has to be transparent … in making those decisions. The companies are just told, whom to help, and this help does not go to those, who really need it, but to the government-affiliated organizations … It's a vicious cycle. We go to companies and ask whether they have a [financial] capacity to help. They say, we do have the capacity, but it has been exhausted. Exhausted because of this model of cooperation [with the state].

In opposition, political activists insisted that eradicating corruption and making governmental structures transparent and accountable was impossible without changing the political regime. They believed that without a qualitative restructuring of the governance system, the cosmetic changes would only mask the existing problems. State officials could only be held accountable if they competed in fair and free elections, and if the "vertical of power" was abolished.

An important component of that change required changing the laws, which was a common theme for all activists irrespective of the sub-sector they represented. Socially oriented activists were more focused on abolishing the overregulation of the civil society sphere and freedom to do their jobs, yet political and independent activists perceived a major value in the freedom of speech and assembly. They all agreed, however, on the need to repeal the anti-constitutional laws and restore the power of the constitution. Karina reported that, "We have a wonderful constitution, really amazing, which has everything. It regulates everything. But we also have tons of laws that contradict or prohibit certain articles of the constitution. In other words, each parliament member just needs to open this document and read it at least once!"

Nevertheless, without independent judiciary, the laws would remain vulnerable to violations. Independent and political activists realized that transforming the relations between the state and civil society would be impotent without a functioning judiciary system. Activists would be empowered to develop the civil society sector and increase its role in governance by transforming this element alone.

Popular support for civil society initiatives

As discussed in the previous chapter, public support for CSOs is crucial to the success of civil society. On the one hand, the population needs to be involved in designing transformation strategies (Donais, 2012; Richmond, 2011b; Shinoda, 2015); on the other hand, people in Russia have often supported undemocratic regimes (Rose et al., 2011) and pro-state CSOs (Hemment, 2012). Thus, the challenge for Tatarstan's CSOs was to receive support, while trying to foster civic values. The research participants asserted that transforming the attitudes of the population would increase the effectiveness of civil society projects. For instance, Damir argued that even a small increase in popular support could be a deal-breaker:

DAMIR: In fact, we only need … 7-10 percent of active citizens … [and] we could solve any problem …. Our task is to increase the number of people who look at us, [who] participate in our projects, [and who] eventually help us. In other words, we measure our effectiveness also [by] how many people we could persuade to get on our side … to do socially meaningful things.

Regardless of their relations with the government, the research participants agreed that having more active citizens could pressure the authorities to compromise. The political activists suggested that increasing the number of people at political protests would urge the regime to make small concessions and, eventually, trigger a domino effect. Hence, Grigory noted the following in his story:

GRIGORY: It would be great if more people came to our rallies … if, say, a thousand of

people showed up to a rally … the next time we could have the Cube [for political

campaigning], and the mayor wouldn't bully us, and the police wouldn't bully us. If only

people showed their power, the authorities would understand that they were irrational and

allow the rallies.

The power of meaningful civic engagement was supported by practical examples of civil

society experiences. The study participants demonstrated that their most successful civil society

projects had been possible due to mass participation of the grassroots. The rise in people's

participation increased charitable donations, making CSOs less dependent on government

funding. The impact of people's participation was especially visible for independent activists

who often aimed at improving (e.g., environmental) conditions for all citizens rather than

working with a specific target group. Whenever their initiatives gained popular support, they

resulted in changes; without the support, the government simply ignored their efforts. According

to Lilia, her groups had experienced overwhelming support in the villages affected by the

environmental hazard, where at least one person from each family participated in the protests. In

her experience, Kazan citizens were less vocal in protecting the environment. Kazan is the

political capital and the largest city in Tatarstan, so it needed to pioneer and model

transformation of public participation, yet it was not happening. This is what Lilia had to say on

the issue:

LILIA: If only in Kazan one in six people protested against the Kazanka backfilling,

right? There are 1,200,000 [people] in Kazan, so we would have 200,000 [people]

protesting. Then we would not need to ask whether there are any politicians and

entrepreneurs that want to destroy the environment. They could still keep their jobs, do their business, and I am absolutely sure that they would make very different politics and very different business if only these people [protesters] took to the streets and they [politicians and entrepreneurs] saw them. It is such a power. We don't need to spoil anything, to break anything, to destroy anything. We just need to show that we exist.

In contrast, some research participants felt discouraged by the lack of popular support for their activities while others felt optimistic about the prospects of civic engagement in the near future. Rafael articulated that, "There will be more [committed people], our country is strong, you have no idea how strong [it could be] when people become active citizens. All of it is being promoted by civil society. They [civic activists] explain that we need to vote … [that] patriotism is not just about recycling."

The study participants connected the anticipated rise in grassroots participation to the increase of youth participation in both political and socially oriented civil society initiatives. Further, political activists believed that the youth were the only active segment of civil society in Tatarstan. They anticipated that it was just a matter of time when young people would secure a greater role for civil society in the governance structure, although they did not provide any details about how this would potentially happen. According to my research participants who represented political organizations, the young people would eventually pressure the middle-aged people (whom they blamed for the insufficient civic engagement) to transform their mindset. For instance, Marat argued that this transformation had to start with the educated urban middle-class people. He noted that, "Of course, I would like to see more liberal people, more free thinkers …

And, of course, I'd like our *intelligentsia* to speak up, [I'd like] it to join this [civil society] system. Someone maybe needs to change the country, someone needs to re-think their views."

Socially oriented activists envisioned the transformation of civic engagement through the gradual involvement of young people in socially significant projects. They also assumed that civil society was responsible for initiating this shift. For instance, Rezeda asserted that the problem with participation could be resolved by the early engagement of children and youth in volunteering and other socially responsible activities in schools. She concluded that, "Ideally, I think that the number of people who trust NGOs should increase, and this can only happen through the civic engagement … I would really want more young people there [in civil society] because, yes, now there is youth there but not enough. I think we need to find ways to reach out to schools, to children."

Despite their commitment to transforming public participation, the study participants did not elaborate on their specific strategies to increase public support to civil society's activities. They mentioned that education and social media were the main tools they could use in attracting more popular support for civil society projects. On the larger scale, however, they recognized the limitations to any strategy, unless it is designed and promoted by the joint efforts of the state and all civil society groups and organizations.

Discussions and findings

The question about the desired changes in Tatarstan's civil society sector was open-ended, so that the study participants could imagine any (even dreamlike) solutions to civil society's problems. However, the majority of my respondents proposed gradual and practical

measures to increase the role of Tatarstan's civil society sector. Describing their hopes for the future allowed the research participants to think beyond the existing limitations and value even small chances for potential advancement. They also helped activists re-assess the goals of their organizations and encouraged them to brainstorm specific mechanisms that could be used in achieving these goals.

Considering the uncertainty of the political environment, the greater goals of political transformation were often determined along with smaller and more detailed objectives, which could be achieved by the actions of Tatarstan's CSOs. In envisioning the future of Tatarstan's civil society, the study participants argued that political transformation was a shared responsibly of civil society, the state, and the population. Having identified these key stakeholders, the research participants outlined seven areas of improvement within and across these main sectors.

Overcoming the division of the civil society sector. In relation to the changes within civil society, all of the study participants recognized that partnerships between various groups and actors were necessary but problematic. The majority of the interviewees saw a greater potential in collaborative initiatives. In their experience, cooperation with other CSOs leveraged the results of their projects. All Tatarstan's civil society activists had to liaise with other groups or organizations and collaborate on various projects. They argued that advancing cooperation within the civil society sector could increase its role in advocacy and service delivery.

In reality, cooperation rarely expanded beyond the sub-group that the study participants represented whether socially oriented, political or independent. Even though the study participants declared openness to cooperation, in detailing their partnerships with the CSOs from other sub-sectors they acknowledged the lack of understanding and support from the local population.

Most of the time, however, the goals of different CSOs were not incompatible. Political activists needed independent activists tactically and resorted to working with them on certain projects. Their rare collaboration with the socially oriented CSOs was also not due to disagreement but to the lack of having an overarching vision for both sub-sectors. Several socially oriented activists highlighted that they did not want to undermine their ability to deliver projects by being affiliated with the political civil society sub-sector. While socially oriented organizations distanced themselves from other sub-sectors, their concerns about cooperating were only partially related to funding opportunities, they also shared few positive experiences of working with political CSOs and, thus, could not relate to their goals. Finally, independent activists were open to cooperation but looked for partners out of necessity rather than strategically, which was due both to their lack of sufficient resources and the misunderstandings they had with political CSOs. In addition, this competition between CSOs was fostered by the state and satisfied the state's interest for maintaining centralized political control.

Although the study participants identified the problem with cross-sectoral collaboration and hoped for more communication with other CSOs, they did not share a joint and well-defined vision of how to bridge the differences among various civil society clusters. When the sub-sectors worked together (as, for instance, independent groups and political activists), this collaboration was provisional and did not translate into formulating a joint strategy. Further, while activists had their assumptions about the goals of other sub-sectors, they did not have an opportunity to learn from them directly and consistently. The lack of practical solutions for systematic collaboration among different sub-sectors of civil society hindered its potential for formulating common goals and participating in governance.

Besides the obvious limits on civil society development and sustainability, the lack of a collaborative strategy coupled with the neglect of advocacy work often affected the capacity of Tatarstan's CSOs to deliver social projects. To give credit to civil society activists, they attempted to build informal networks and reach out to CSOs and groups outside of Tatarstan. Considering their lack of having other tools of communication, these temporary networks helped to support the capacity of the civil society networks, albeit to a limited extent. The study participants realized that their ability to advocate for their clients and resist government policies was critically low. Hence, some participants, in particular independent activists, also perceived the informal civil society networks to be leverage in increasing their policy capacity.

Further, the study participants demonstrated that the ability of CSOs to form a joint strategy was undermined by the lack of safe spaces to allow for the collaboration to take place. The majority of the study participants expressed their frustration with the lack of critical spaces for CSOs to be able to work together. In Tatarstan, these spaces were limited to either government-sponsored forums (only available to socially oriented organizations) or ad hoc informal meetings and social media forums. Without safe and autonomous spaces for collaboration, the civil society activists were not able to devise effective strategies for cultivating relationships across the sectors. All activists agreed on the necessity of having a joint safe space for communication purposes. At the same time, the research participants experienced difficulties in imagining sustainable alternatives to the collaboration tools that were at their disposal. Their opinions varied from using these existing tools and trying to change them to unilaterally choosing one independent online platform.

Above all, the study participants saw government policies as an obstacle for CSOs in attempting to formulate a joint strategy. The state largely enforced many restrictions to prevent

CSOs from building comprehensive civil society networks. The scarcity of resources restricted the capacity of Tatarstan's civil society to design and deliver projects outside of the government's agenda. As highlighted by all of the study participants, the government controlled most of the funding resources, allocating them to the projects compatible to federal and regional development strategies.

Designing the joint strategy. In envisioning a viable model for cooperation, Tatarstan's civil society activists faced a dilemma: overcoming the current division within the sector could potentially jeopardize its independence. Designing a joint strategy and space for collaboration between diverse civil society groups and organizations led to a debate about who should be included in this process. The research participants demonstrated that civic activists did not have a shared opinion on this issue. Political activists noted that a compromise could only be found if socially oriented organizations included advocacy efforts, whereas socially oriented activists wanted their political counterparts to focus on the needs of the population. My conversations with the study participants demonstrated that socially oriented CSOs in general were more open to advocacy than they were credited for, while many political activists did consider socially oriented projects. It seems that the pro-state organizations were the only problematic piece of this equation, as they mostly complied with the state's policies and reinforced the existing power structures. Conversely, excluding the pro-state organizations from negotiating cooperation with other Tatarstan's CSOs offered better prospects to civil society in overcoming Tatarstan's civil society fragmentation.

Further, including certain age groups in their organizations were considered by only some CSOs, and the most vulnerable groups were only served by a few socially oriented organizations. If Tatarstan's civil society was to strive for equal representation and social cohesion, it critically

needed to collaborate across the civil society sector to include these groups. Several study participants also expressed their concerns that Tatarstan's CSOs were engaging predominantly with the urban educated population. In their vision for change, this representation imbalance could be overcome through coaction with the CSOs that extended their services and engagement strategies beyond the traditionally active groups of citizens.

Promoting financial independence. To overcome CSOs financial dependency and to withstand unequal competition among CSOs for government grants, several research participants looked into social enterprise, collaboration with the private sector, and other ways of marketizing their work. Unlike other Russian regions where socially oriented CSOs mostly benefit from charitable donations, user fees and private companies' donations (Mersiianova, 2016), Tatarstan's CSOs have enjoyed greater support from the regional and federal governments. The ideas of providing alternative funding for CSOs emerged yet they were still at a very early stage to demonstrate that their prospects could be successfully applied in Tatarstan. The study participants demonstrated creativity in envisioning their financial independence strategies. Government limitations inspired some to consider funding options that were unconventional in terms of Tatarstan's civil society model. Several study participants suggested that social entrepreneurship and for-profit strategies could solve some of their immediate funding problems and promote independence from government funding. They also shared some examples of their effective for-profit projects that they had developed concurrently with, or as a part of, their civil society projects. Those successes motivated the activists to share their experiences and advise other CSOs on fundraising techniques.

At the same time, the civic activists did not provide a unified solution in developing alternative funding strategies on the marketization of the civil society sector. Several

interviewees asserted that nonprofits should not turn to business strategies and traditional funding through grants would be more effective if they were tailored to the needs of civil society rather than to the government's agenda. Their legitimate concern about the negative impacts of focusing on CSOs' profitability was tightly related to the question of their accountability in the context of Tatarstan. The study participants, who argued for civil society funding through government grants, admitted that government funding focused only on specific socially oriented projects and that fundraising for other projects could increase the CSOs' capacity on the ground. However, they hoped that the government would keep the CSOs accountable to their mandate. Others argued that diversified funding would not revoke accountability and could both increase the potential of civil society and guarantee the adherence of CSOs to their mission and vision.

In addition, the study participants shared the examples of allying with private companies on several successful civil society projects in Tatarstan. Although the CSOs had to be mindful of all possible consequences when partnering with the private sector considering the limited tools available to CSOs to hold private corporations responsible, they have had overall positive experiences of partnering with the private sector tactically against the government's corruption. The study participants were committed to explore the potential of this partnership further.

Increasing transparency and accountability. Another change within the civil society sector, advocated by the study participants, was the increase in the transparency and accountability of Tatarstan's CSOs. Without the working accountability mechanisms, there is always a risk of power abuse (Levasseur & MacDonald, 2018). The key question in this debate was should civil society be accountable to the donors (including government) or to the public? Analyzing the role of CSOs in holding the EU institutions accountable to their constituencies,

Kohler-Koch (2010) argues that CSOs need to advance accountability mechanisms that will hold them responsible to the public.

Study participants confirmed that they used their donors' accountability mechanisms instead of developing their own. In the system of outsourcing service provisions to Tatarstan's CSOs, they were responsible to the government as their main donor without having an equal say in formulating these accountability policies. The government-designed accountability system, including the Public Chamber, inevitably prioritized pro-government CSOs and supported them financially, while discouraging the rest with excessive legal and financial regulation. As discussed above, a few activists believed that only the government had the capacity to hold CSOs accountable. However, the majority of my study participants were against this government imposed accountability system. They believed that being accountable to the regional authorities undermined the credibility of civil society and impeded the recruitment of popular support.

Another element of accountability concerned the relations between civil society and the federal and regional authorities. This dual accountability was specifically relevant to the issues of the environment, HIV prevention, and others that had a visible impact outside the boundaries of Tatarstan. Even when focusing on these seemingly local problems, civil society activists also felt accountable to the whole nation in protecting its health and well-being. On the one hand, the dual accountability raised numerous problems for Tatarstan's CSOs, compelling them to report to both the regional and federal authorities. On the other hand, some activists believed that the tensions between the federal and regional authorities could be effectively leveraged to transform the accountability system and discontinue government dependency. By capitalizing on the tensions between the federal and local governments, these activists hoped to design and promote accountability mechanisms driven by their target groups.

In their interviews, the study participants also connected accountability to transparency. Several respondents asserted that the nontransparent mechanisms discouraged the public from participation. They believed that people in Tatarstan might view civil society as corrupt due to relations between the government and pro-state CSOs and their non-transparent decision-making. These activists suggested that the local population extrapolated their distrust to other CSOs.

At the same time, the majority of my study participants were also critical about the transparency of all of Tatarstan's civil society organizations and groups. They argued that the CSOs' work process and outcomes often lacked transparency as a result of the activists' exhaustion and inadequate resources, which prevented them from strategizing and implementing transparent practices. The study participants admitted that civic activists did not make enough effort in detailing their priorities and explain their decision-making processes to local people. Their solution to this problem was to design civil society projects in consultation with the population, which only a few CSOs were already doing, and to study and implement the best transparency and accountability practices.

Participating in governance. The changes advocated for the civil society sector were tightly connected to other factors, most importantly, to its relations with the state and the grassroots population. The government's policies largely undermined transparency and fair play advocated by the study participants, and civic activists lacked the instruments to impact those decisions. As illustrated in Chapter 6, civil society was significantly restricted from participating in governance. My study participants believed that their vision of governance was incompatible with the current government's position and argued for greater involvement in governance. Civil society activists asserted that changes were necessary to reflect the needs of people and could be

accomplished through the civil society's involvement in formulating policies and sharing equal responsibility.

The study participants identified two main directions for the proposed civil society's involvement in governance. First, they suggested that civil society could become a training field for future bureaucrats and politicians, transmitting the knowledge and civic values up through the activists' direct involvement in the political system. This approach was mostly supported by the political activists. Some respondents (mostly independent), however, believed that the role of civil society was to partner with the government on an equal footing but that it should never merge with the government's structures. In this second scenario, civil society would need to be an equal partner, and not simply have a consultative vote. Further, the interviewees suggested that the government could also benefit from equal relationships owing to the grassroots expertise of CSOs.

If given the opportunity, the study participants were ready to contribute to lawmaking. Socially oriented and independent activists had formulated alternative programs in their respective fields, and several were based on consultation with their target groups yet they were short of mechanisms to transfer these documents into real policies. They identified one possible solution to promote their agenda in the future; to compete in the elections for local legislative bodies or support independent candidates who promoted their ideas. All these tactics were temporary and, without comprehensive political transformation, they could offer only limited results. Nevertheless, the study participants did not share a joint opinion on the fundamental issue of political transformation. Political activists argued for ousting Putin's administration, while others believed that the Putin's political opponents were equally corrupt and could destroy the fragile socioeconomic stability through radical neoliberal policies, yet others believed that

only through changing the population's mentality could any political transformation bring long-lasting results.

These different opinions prevented the study participants from developing a joint vision of political transformation beyond hoping for an increased role of civil society in governance. The respondents also demonstrated that their vision for civil society participation in governance was difficult to realize because Tatarstan's civil society lacked all the necessary elements of self-regulation, such as sufficient institutional mechanisms and equitable relations with the government and the local population. Most importantly, the CSOs could not develop mechanisms for cooperation within the sector and between civil society and the state, and they continued to use the Public Chamber and other top-down mechanisms created by the state. As a result, their visions for the future demonstrated the gap between those activists, who argued for changing the political regime, and those who focused on the minor adjustments of government policies. The avoidance of politicizing their agenda limited the tools available to them for facilitating societal transformation.

Engaging the local population. The study participants recognized the local population as civil society's collaborator in creating their vision for change. Chapter 7 has established that the strategies that Tatarstan's civil society had previously employed to mobilize popular support were insufficient for it to become a connector between the government and the population. My study participants argued that without a change in public opinion, CSOs would not be effective in recruiting support to their projects.

They also realized that there was a certain responsibility of civil society in challenging popular distrust to CSOs. Some activists asserted that negative attitudes could be transformed through education. In their experiences, people often changed their attitudes when interacting

with civil society activists. Nevertheless, the opportunities for educating the population were very limited, as both the educational system and the mass media were largely controlled by the state, leaving civic activists only social media space to thrive in.

The study participants did not present their vision of how the CSOs could affect greater popular engagement. Most of their recruitment strategies were retroactive and, although some activists started to critically analyze failures in recruiting popular support, they could not conceptualize how to enhance these strategies. Tatarstan's civil society critically lacked the capacity to both effectively receive knowledge from the population and transmit it to the governance level. Therefore, activists mostly hoped that the change would emerge within the population, advancing popular support and fostering civil society's evolution. Cooperation with the government on this matter remained controversial. Some socially oriented activists believed that the state could impact popular attitudes to civil society participation through the available means to it, while others thought that the passive mentality of the general population was the result of government policies and they hoped that changes would happen within the population without the state's interference.

Supporting political transformation. The research has demonstrated that Tatarstan's civil society's past had impacted its future considerably. The most difficult question activists had to address was how much the future can be different if the same political and socioeconomic institutions remain in place? While the current authoritarian political regime is responsible for suppressing civil society, many of the institutional structures reinforcing this suppression were created during the attempted democratic transition of the 1990s. Without creating stable communities, promoting favourable socioeconomic conditions, addressing government corruption, and strengthening the judicial system, the formal democratic structures did not

prevent Russia from sliding back into autocracy. Thus, many of my study participants, with the exception of political activists, were critical of changing persons in power without reimaging the institutions. They argued for the development of effective economic and social programs to address structural limitations and to cultivate active citizenry. Conversely, political activists believed that impeaching Vladimir Putin and restarting democratization would reverse negative developments and open up space to renegotiate Tatarstan's future. Regardless of their affiliation, the study participants found it difficult to propose a potential strategy for forging sustainable transformation that would be rooted in local support in order to avoid another failed democratic transition.

Conclusion

This chapter presented Tatarstan's civil society activists' visions for the future. The transformation is needed within the civil society sector and in its relations with the state and the population. Civil society sub-sectors need to design a mutually beneficial joint strategy, increase the sector's transparency, accountability, and knowledge. They are also forced to think outside the box in finding solutions to funding dependency. Finally, civil society needs to develop a self-regulating model (or meaningfully contribute to designing the regulations), without which they will continue to depend on government regulations. At the same time, Tatarstan's civil society faces critical structural limitations. Without the changes within the population and the state, civil society will continue to be restrained in its capacity to foster political transformation or to participate in governance. The next chapter summarizes the key research findings, draws some overall conclusions, and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 9

Conclusions. Prospects for Tatarstan's civil society: Implications for theory and practice

Introduction

CSOs fulfill most important functions, including but not limited to holding government accountable, advocating for citizens' rights, and providing basic services to the population. Their efforts to create more equitable and inclusive communities in some cases have resulted in transformative policy changes, whereas in others CSOs have been incapable of overcoming structural factors that undermine their efforts. In restricted political environments, all hands are needed on deck when it comes to empowering civil society. The initial determination to change is not enough for sustainable transformation. Similar to a conflict that does not end with a ceasefire agreement (Lederach, 1997), the change in the political regime does not ensure effective citizen-centered governance. This case study of Tatarstan demonstrates that the disparity between the local knowledge and the externally designed frameworks undermines support for CSOs. Coupled with political repression, the gap between the different levels of society (the population, civil society, and the state) will likely continue to grow and challenge the sustainability of possible reforms.

This study aimed to explore the question of the role of civil society in locally based political transformation and governance in Tatarstan. Further, the research examined civil society in its diverse local forms and relations with other key stakeholders, namely the population and state. The four previous chapters elaborated on the major themes that emerged from the interviews with some of Tatarstan's civil society activists. The respondents represent three main civil society sub-sectors and share different views on the current status of Tatarstan's civil society, as well as the visions for its future advancement. Despite their expressed concerns, the

study participants also demonstrated resilience and hope for the increased role of civil society in Tatarstan's political transformation and governance.

The key grounded theoretical concept

In their assessments of Tatarstan's civil society, the research participants reflected on the context, in which the CSOs had developed their relations within and across society's socioeconomic and political sectors, and the challenges faced by civic activists. This data has led to the emergence of the grounded theoretical concept of the disconnected civil society. This concept refers to the division of Tatarstan's civil society sector into three different sub-sectors, while socially oriented CSOs are also fragmented into pro-state and grassroots organizations. Further, Tatarstan's civil society appears to be polarized along political (openly political vs. aseptically apolitical) and geographical lines (Kazan vs. smaller urban and rural areas). Up to this point, Tatarstan's CSOs were not able to collectively re-negotiate their identities and cut through their fragmentation toward ensuring a stronger civil society role in governance.

In addition to the fact that civil society is both fragmented and suffering from insufficient communication within the sector, it is also largely isolated from other sectors of society and, disproportionally, with governance. Tatarstan's CSOs are solo players when it comes to advocating for their target groups and when they fundraise. Similarly, most of the local CSOs remain removed from the population they represent and struggle to attract popular support. The civil society activists realized the harmfulness of detachment from the local people, however, they have not been successful in bridging this gap because of their ineffective strategies for attracting public support to CSOs. As a result, Tatarstan's civil society was weakened because the local population did not support it, as much as it was constrained by the state. Finally, this

disintegration of social connectedness supported the enhancement of the authoritarian regime in Tatarstan and the political centralization of power.

Overall key findings

   Tatarstan's civil society division. There was a visible division between the three civil society clusters in Tatarstan, namely political, socially oriented and independent clusters. To a certain extent, this division impaired the development of a shared vision for civil society. The study participants from these different groups could not agree on the political (or apolitical) stance of each other.

   The division between the socially oriented and political organizations is consistent with the previous research on Russian civil society. For instance, Bindman (2015) highlights the differences between the advocacy groups and social providers, who have developed on the basis of different values, whereas Buxton (2014) refers to them as the groups focused "on street protesting" and on the "practical ways to make services work" (p. 166). The low level of cooperation and trust between both branches of civil society has also been pointed out by Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova (2010).

   At the same, Tatarstan's independent civil society groups were more than simply an extension of political or socially oriented CSOs. Although they could be easily confused with political CSOs due to the use of similar tactics (protests and rallies), the study participants have highlighted the unique status of Tatarstan's independent civil society groups. The research has also shown that the division between the sub-sectors was not always clear-cut and many groups (and activists) existed on different dimensions along the civil society spectrum, not fitting neatly into just one category.

On the surface, civil society activists had a diverging view on the role of civil society in the governing process and used two different meanings of a civil society activist (*grazhdanskii activist* and *obshchestvennik*). The supporters of *grazhdanskii activist* often understand civil society as advocacy CSOs, while those who use *obshchestvennik* usually focus on social service delivery. This dual approach in understanding civil society reflected the Russian value system with its combination of traditional, Soviet, and liberal values (Chebankova, 2015). The history of Tatarstan's civil society has indeed played a significant role in its current fragmentation. Most notably, the rise of independent environmental groups is consistent with the fact that in the last years of the Soviet Union the environmental movement was "the only autonomous movement permitted" (Ljubownikow et al., 2013, p. 156).

These differences in understanding civil society's functions have also demonstrated the lack of an overarching agreement about the role of civil society in achieving democratic standards, which contrasted with the expectations of democratization theorists (e.g. Munck, 2011, 2016; Post & Rosenblum, 2002; Sharp, 2010). Conversely, the division of Tatarstan's civil society supports liberal democracy critics, who point out the disadvantages of transplanting Western-type liberal NGOs without assessing the local needs (e.g. Richmond, 2011b; Shinoda, 2015) and addressing Russia's institutional limitations (Gill, 2006; Buxton, 2014; Henderson, 2011; Spencer, 2010).

It seems, however, that prioritizing one set of values (political rights and civil liberties) over the other (social welfare) is not necessary. Researchers have argued that advocacy and service provision should not be seen as mutually exclusive civil society functions (see for example, Cortright et al., 2016), and the emergence of Tatarstan's independent civil society groups that try to combine socioeconomic functions with advocacy supports this view.

Ultimately, the study participants agreed that if people had their basic economic and social rights fulfilled they were more likely to become active in advocating for their rights and freedoms so that having those rights guaranteed would provide venues to promote socioeconomic demands.

Different but closely related. Upon closer examination, the study participants' understandings of civil society were not completely contradictory to each other. Although the research participants offered diverse civil society definitions, all of these definitions focused on civil society functions. Their vision for civil society was consistent with the dynamic understanding of civil society as a continuous negotiation process (Cory, 2010). This ability to imagine civil society beyond the traditional to Tatarstan binary model of civil society opens possibilities for re-conceptualizing the civil society sector and addressing the roots of its fragmentation.

Although the study participants emphasized the CSOs' different functions, they all agreed that civil society activists should play a key role in formulating the governance agenda. The respondents claimed they were in a unique position to accumulate the local knowledge. Learning from the population level is crucial for CSOs in both receiving and channeling grassroots knowledge to the governance level (Lederach, 1997, 2010). Study participants' ideas on the benefits of including civil society in the governing process have been in line with local ownership theoretical approaches (for example, De Coning, 2016, 2018; Donais, 2012, 2015; Richmond, 2011b) and highlighted the widening gap between the local people and Tatarstan's political administration.

The understanding of civil society's critical role in channeling grassroots knowledge to the governance strata united the study participants despite their disagreements on other issues. Whereas Russian civil society researchers point out that it may be difficult to reach a broad

consensus on the values in Russia (Chebankova, 2015), civic activists from all of Tatarstan's civil society sub-groups believed that they had a better connection to their target groups and, as a result, better knowledge of their everyday needs than any of Tatarstan's politicians.

Influenced by the shared history. The historical development had affected not only local understandings of civil society but also its capacity in governance. All of the study participants agreed that the Soviet heritage has been particularly harmful to civil society development in Russian regions and in Tatarstan specifically. Some interviewees also believed that the design of the civil society framework was flawed from its inception in the early 1990s. Others argued that the impact of CSOs on the governing process had decreased lately. They acknowledged that the governing elite manipulated nationalist organizations, which were praised for their successes in the 1990s, yet their role had been a priori limited.

In both cases, however, the interpretation of state – civil society relations in Tatarstan overlapped with the critique of elite ownership of political transformation (e.g. Donais, 2012; Obershall, 2007; Taylor, 2010) and united Tatarstan's activists across the civil society sector. Respondents acknowledged that the role of civil society in governance had been restricted from the early 1990s. Above all else, the seeming success of early CSOs meant that they did not search for practical tools in order to remain independent from the government and to build partnerships with other civic groups. As a result, they remained vulnerable to authoritarian tendencies.

Regional divisions. The study participants recognized that the civil society space in Moscow and St. Petersburg was considerably different from that in other Russian regions including Tatarstan. Research on Russia's civil society has been criticized for focusing only on certain regions, in particular Moscow as the center of political leadership (Javeline &

Lindemann-Komarova, 2010), yet this fact has not impacted Tatarstan's civil society's best practices significantly. The study participants pointed out that they had learned directly from other activists not institutional networks or academic research. The study has demonstrated that Tatarstan's activists had redefined best civil society practices from other regions and designed new approaches that reflected Tatarstan's specific context. Despite the local specifics, which were pointed out by the respondents, there were also certain overlaps in the dynamics of civil society development in Moscow and in Tatarstan. In particular, in Moscow independent groups emerged prior to Tatarstan in response to similar tendencies (Epileva & Magun, 2014).

The study participants disagreed about whether the disparity between Russian regions presented more challenges or opportunities for Tatarstan's CSOs. The growing dependency of Tatarstan's government on the federal center allowed some independent activists to effectively oppose the policies of the local government and navigate the feuds between the regional and federal elites. Oftentimes, however, these opportunities to expand their role in governance were short-lived and ineffective to significantly challenge the overwhelming restrictions of Tatarstan's public space.

Tatarstan's special case. The asymmetrical power relations and adverse political environment most notably undermined political CSOs yet they also weakened Tatarstan's independent and socially oriented organizations. Contrary to the argument that preferential treatment is given to Russia's loyal CSOs (Tarasenko, 2015, 2018), the study has revealed that the grassroots socially oriented CSOs did not enjoy any substantial privileges in Tatarstan, nor did the independent activists. Despite having nominal access to government funding, they were not consulted by the government and were limited in the opportunities provided to them to advocate for their clients. Pro-state organizations, which were either initiated or supported by

Tatarstan's authorities, were somewhat better off financially yet essentially, they were as vulnerable as other CSOs. They were also unable to design and implement long-term strategies to reduce their government dependence.

Funding was a powerful tool for shaping civic activism considering its dependence on the funding provided either by the government, private donors, or its own revenue. Researchers have argued that funding can either promote capacity or create dependency (Creary & Byrne, 2014; Skarlato et al., 2016); it also makes CSOs accountable to their donors with regard to spending grant money (Evans & Shields, 2010; Hyde & Byrne, 2015). Tatarstan's CSOs experienced all the negative impacts of government regulated funding. Financial dependency further minimized their ability to challenge government policies.

At the same time, the generous financial support afforded to Tatarstan's socially oriented CSOs had allowed them to develop a greater capacity than in most other regions. Several study participants suggested that prior to the 2017 banking crisis, Tatarstan's socially oriented organizations had chances to evolve and overcome government dependency, however, this potential for CSOs' greater independence was never realized because this period of financial prosperity was very short.

The distinctness of Tatarstan's civil society was also evident in local rigorous legislation regulating protest activity. Encouraged by the federal leaders who have argued that Russia has developed a unique type of democracy not an authoritarian regime (Turovsky, 2014), the local government tolerated advocacy only in relation to non-political causes to maintain a disguise of legitimacy. Tatarstan's officials imitated democratic procedures when confronted by apolitical activists and used repressive measures against political protestors. Ultimately, government actions were often a formality to silence or exhaust activists.

Civil society's role in governance. The common theme that united all study participants regardless of the civil society groups or organizations they represented was the need to increase the role of civil society in governance. Civil society activists shared common concerns about the role of civil society was playing in the governing process. Some of these concerns were related to civil society's limited access to the governance level and the use of enforcement mechanisms against civic activists. However, most of their concerns were related to the control of the civil society sphere and mistrust of the knowledge of civil society activists. Authors have pointed out that asymmetrical relations with the government and donors' control over funding prevent civil society from achieving its full potential to formulate their own strategies to improve governance (Levasseur & Frankel, 2016; Levasseur, 2018a; Thériault, 2012). Similarly, the study participants revealed the negative impacts of the extreme inequality in the state – civil society relations in Tatarstan and argued for including CSOs in governance as equal partners.

Further, the study participants identified the conflicting visions for governance among state officials and civil society activists as the key challenge in their relations with the state. Tatarstan's authorities needed CSOs with experience to provide services but only granted them a consultative status. Activists, on the contrary, saw their mission in developing the agenda together with the state representatives and holding them accountable to their promises. Their view of consultation as an insufficient form of collaboration with the state conforms governance research (e.g. Macdonald & Levasseur, 2014).

Finally, civic activists (independent activists, in particular) demonstrated an ability to develop relations with certain government officials, however, their fragmented efforts lacked the capacity to challenge the system significantly. Similar to the direct communication tools promoted by the government (Henry, 2012; Schuler, 2015), these personal contacts with

sympathetic officials, addressed some immediate needs, yet they did not increase the role of civil society in governance and upheld Tatarstan's authoritarian political system.

Local support to civil society. The inadequate participation of the local population in civil society initiatives remained the biggest obstacle to CSOs' success in Tatarstan. This finding is partly consistent with the public opinion polls, which have claimed that participation in Russia's CSOs has been largely insufficient both in socially oriented CSOs and in political protests (e.g., Levada Center, 2018; Public Opinion Foundation, 2001a; Public Opinion Foundation, 2007). While some polls ranked Tatarstan fairly high in protest activity, giving the region 12th place out of 85 Russian regions (Institute of Regional Expertise, 2019a), in-person engagement in CSOs was also very limited. The study participants confirmed the discrepancy between the declared and real-life participation indicated in the polls. Tatarstan's residents participated in protests only in response to socioeconomic problems, such as the 2017 banking crisis.

Whereas the shift to online participation is consistent with the rest of the world (see Kerr, 2009), in Russia the censorship of the Runet and social media prevented political activists from advancing their online presence (Klyueva, 2016). As a result, the online activism did not lead to mass mobilization, as it did in Ukraine (Way, 2014) and other post-Soviet countries. Overall, the level of public support for Tatarstan's CSOs was related to two factors. First, participation varied depending on the sub-sector with more support given to the issues people felt more personally connected to, such as the environment. In other instances, public support depended on CSOs' outreach capacity and prominence. The research of charitable practices has argued that Russians have greater trust for prominent nonprofit organizations (Mersiianova & Korneeva, 2017). This

conclusion was congruent with higher support for Tatarstan's pro-state youth organizations (Petrukhina, 2010), which had a greater capacity to publicize their work.

Nevertheless, several study participants asserted that the statistical information on public support for civil society was not always clear-cut. Overall, the polls reflected two criteria: people's willingness to participate in protest activity and participation in (or support for) nonprofit organizations. Although the examples of independent activism in Tatarstan demonstrated that people preferred to participate in voluntary work informally, their sporadic civil society activism was mostly unaccounted for, so was voluntary engagement outside of the formal organizations.

Recruitment and representation. The methods of recruiting public support by Tatarstan's CSOs were also limited. In addition to government restrictions, civil society activists often avoided communication with people from different social realms. Russia's political opposition scholars have titled this narrow focus as "the opposition's electoral ghetto"; this expression refers to prioritizing the small 'progressive' segment of the population that openly supports opposition over the rest (the 'mob') (Fedorov, 2010; Kynev & Liubarev, 2011). In Russia, civil society activism is often seen as a job for the *intelligentsia* (Kalinin, 2018). In addition, the education divide in Russia is currently growing and increasing the societal divide (Morgan at el., 2019).

Despite their ambition to represent all of the population, the focus on a selected audience was most common for the political CSOs in Tatarstan. However, the socially oriented organizations and independent groups were also selective in representing local voices. With the exception of several activists who had consciously chosen to work with the marginalized populations, many participants admitted that it was harder for them to reach out to low-educated

or disadvantaged groups. A key element that was often missing from the recruitment strategy of Tatarstan's activists (with the exception of independent groups) was including all population groups in authoring the civil society agenda, as argued by the PACS scholars (for example, Donais, 2012). Further, when the representatives of these marginalized groups engage in CSOs, it enriches the advocacy work of these organizations (DeSantis, 2013).

Although the study participants represented various backgrounds, including rural, the majority of them already had or were getting a university education and, in fact, they argued that they needed higher education to be effective in their activism. Civil society activists were the most articulate representatives of their communities; still, many became disconnected from certain groups of the population that they were representing. Thus, the online tools also disproportionately targeted young people. Although young people are more active in political CSOs (e.g. Patrusheva, 2013; Ponomarev, Belov, & Mailis, 2018), and in the pro-government youth-led CSOs (Hemment, 2012), research has shown that older people in Russia are also increasingly active (mostly, by donating) and willing to volunteer, although there are fewer (mostly, faith-based) organizations that recruit them (Korneeva & Minnigaleeva, 2017).

The focus on a limited segment of the population – educated middle class young people – also determined CSOs' communication strategies. Social media had been effective in mobilizing social protests during the 2011-2012 Bolotnaya protests in Russia (White & Mcallister, 2014), and continued to be overwhelmingly used by Tatarstan's political activists to recruit public support. Other CSOs were also predominantly using social media for recruitment. Whereas the online engagement was a positive development that allowed CSOs to resist government restrictions, it did not provide long-term public support for Tatarstan's CSOs. The social media algorithms normally sponsor the information based on user preferences (Svensson, 2014), and a

lot of information about civil society initiatives only reached a limited group of Tatarstan's residents.

Partnering with the local population. The advocates of local ownership have argued for including the local population in political transformation bearing in mind that this process also needs to be supported by institutional change (Donais, 2012; Mac Ginty 2011, 2012, 2014). However, only a few CSOs included their target groups into authoring their strategy. Everyday engagement in local civil society forms becomes important in increasing local capacity to mobilize for change. The study participants asserted that even a small increase in engagement could provide greater leverage for civil society to negotiate with the authorities and to initiate the transformation of current practices. They believed that the success of civil society initiatives in Tatarstan depended on local participation. Yet, despite people's high discontent with Tatarstan's government, civic activists could not find ways to engage the broader population meaningfully.

Korneeva and Oyner (2018) assert that Russian CSOs in general are oriented towards the needs of the donors not the beneficiaries of their projects. Few nonprofits collect information about their target groups and even fewer use this information in planning their programs. The study participants demonstrated that this dilemma was true for Tatarstan's CSOs but they could not conceptualize practical ways to overcoming it.

Implications for future research and practice

The study participants provided their analysis of the factors that impact Tatarstan's civil activists based on their experiences and aspirations. They pointed at many obstacles to Tatarstan's CSOs' efforts in building a viable civil society sector. The complexity of the issues faced by Tatarstan's disconnected civil society emphasized the need to integrate existing PACS

theoretical concepts into formulating interventions to increase civil society's capacity.

Researchers have argued that the factors that empower (or disempower) civil society, among

others, include the state, free mass media, diversity within the sector, and the influence of

external factors, including donors (Paffenholz et al., 2010, p. 405). Further, the strength of civil

society is in its "ability to build creative relationships within a society and between civil society

actors and policymakers" (Cortright et al., 2016, p. 235). The measures to overcome CSOs'

challenges, above all else, need to include the development and implementation of a

collaboration framework that would diversify civil society and increase its resilience to other

disempowering factors. Thus, theoretical concepts of agency and local ownership became the

leitmotif in developing the following recommendations for Tatarstan's civil society activists.

Bridging the divide. Creating a collaboration framework requires Tatarstan's CSOs to

overcome their divide and expand symmetric connections and partnerships within the sector to

meaningfully include civil society groups that represent different segments of the population. It

has been argued that the division and rivalry between advocacy and service providing CSOs is

harmful for both of them (see Cortright et al., 2016; Levasseur, 2014; Phillips, Laforest, &

Graham, 2010). The harmfulness of this divide is a particularly accurate assessment of the

Russian civil society divide (Bindman, 2015; Buxton, 2014; Johnson & Saarinen, 2011).

Tatarstan's civil society urgently needs to overcome its contention between political and

socially oriented CSOs. Tatarstan's socially oriented organizations and independent groups faced

a dilemma of their commitment to service provision, community building, and other apolitical

civil society functions, plus the inability to foster a favourable socioeconomic environment to

fulfill the needs of their clients. Broadening the scope of their work in cooperation with advocacy

groups and organizations, which pursue a more advanced human rights approach, could increase

the potential of other groups. Similarly, political organizations need to overcome their skepticism about the value of the apolitical groups and work with them on issues that are important for the population. The examples of partnership strategies may be helpful, especially, if they come from other Russian regions, however, civic activists are in the best position to develop a framework that would be effective in Tatarstan's specific environment.

At the same time, researchers have warned against unconditionally embracing the groups that may be sustaining oppressive structures (Mac Ginty, 2014; Donais, 2012). Even in democratic environments, there is a risk of prioritizing service-provision and limiting CSOs' advocacy, if the latter is not protected by government policies (Phillips, Laforest, & Graham, 2010; White, 2012). In Tatarstan, pro-state organizations often emerge as an extension of government structures and cannot collaborate freely with political organizations. The inclusion of pro-state organizations needs to be considered with caution as they may undermine the efforts of the coalition. Independent activists, on the contrary, share grassroots knowledge and connections and including them will add value to civil society partnerships. Initially, the proposed cross-sectoral collaboration may help to increase the CSOs' capacity in delivering day-to-day projects; in the future, it could create an opportunity for formulating a joint strategy and moving away from precarious toward more sustainable forms of civil society.

Establishing communication spaces. Creating a safe and equitable space for communication outside of venues established by Tatarstan's government, such as the Public Chamber, can contribute to designing a mutually beneficial framework for cross-sectoral civil society collaboration and to formulating a joint strategy for Tatarstan's civil society. Lederach (2010) has argued that creating spaces for "imagining" and cultivating social change is as equally important as building relationships. Change needs to be supported through safe spaces that unite

people within and between various sectors. To foster change, civil society actors need autonomous and effective tools for fostering relationships, which Tatarstan's civil society activists are currently missing. They are bound to use the Public Chamber or ad hoc cooperation techniques unless they create (or agree on the use) of a common platform. To begin with, there are independent online platforms civil society activists in Russia use, for instance, Activatica.org – an online community of environmental and civic activists. However, it is important to reach an agreement on having an inclusive space for continuous cooperation between various activists.

Negotiating a joint strategy. Cooperation within the sector can increase the people's trust in Tatarstan's CSOs; however, any design of cross-sectoral collaboration should also include the creation of an accountability and transparency system from the onset. The research has confirmed that the study participants encounter mistrust in their projects due to the misperceptions of the population. The government is imposing the current accountability system rather than it being designed by civil society. Whereas in democratic contexts vertical and horizontal accountability could co-exist (Levasseur, 2018b), in Tatarstan the top-down accountability system does not encourage including the local population in formulating civil society's agenda.

Demonstrating a common strategy, coupled with civic education designed by civil society groups and organizations, could help to overcome the distrust of the population. As pointed out in various interviews, education is necessary both for the activists who could broaden their perspective by learning from each other and for the population that needs to learn about civil society from civic activists, not from the government media. Although there are initiatives aimed at training civil society leaders and activists, the broader population remains mostly unaffected. The challenge for civil society activists is to develop educational programs that would speak to

local people. Further, these programs have the best chance to succeed if they are co-designed with the local population and include diverse groups beyond just the urban educated young people.

Learning from the local people. Most importantly, civil society activists need to engage and learn more from the people they represent. Local knowledge empowers civil society activists, whereas the process of learning and adaptation increases their resilience (De Coning, 2018). By cooperating with each other, civil society activists could get access to other communities and expand their knowledge through a cooperative framework. Online communication will probably remain the easiest and most accessible instrument of raising popular support, therefore, civil society activists need to diversify their tools of communication, as they had already identified in their interviews.

Several study participants raised legitimate concerns about the ability of Tatarstan's population to exercise their agency and unlearn the 'Soviet mentality.' The mentality argument affected the CSOs' relations with Tatarstan's residents, in particular, their communication strategies to recruit public support. Although all of my study participants argued for greater involvement of the population in CSOs, the majority of respondents blamed the local mentality (also nicknamed the "Russian mentality," the "Soviet mentality," and "government dependency") for people's low interest in civil society initiatives. They spoke of the people's power in addressing society's most urgent concerns yet they struggled to imagine ways to engage people on a more meaningful level. The low participation rate of local people in civil society initiatives were often understood by activists as a refusal of people to exercise their agency, and that is deep-rooted in their mentality. The new type of civil society emerging in Tatarstan, which I referred to as independent groups, revealed the potential of greater bottom-up involvement of

the local population. At the same time, the research did not provide sufficient information to argue that the independent groups were more representative of the people's needs.

The underlying theory of agency and local ownership in the literature review chapter demonstrated a contentious relationship between social structures and people's agency. To a great extent, the institutional mechanisms available to people to exercise their agency determined the ways in which the local population participated or excluded itself from involving themselves in CSOs. One of the challenges for civic activists is to facilitate critical dialogue on the values that dominate in Tatarstan's society. Civil society activists need to consider why Tatarstani's want change yet act to keep things the way they are. Learning from the population is also important to avoid the mistakes of the democratic transition attempt of the 1990s, which could not challenge the pre-existing structural limitations that left Tatarstan and Russia in general vulnerable to autocratic tendencies.

Empowering CSOs. Cooperation within the sector may potentially influence civil society's relations with the state. In his *Moral Imagination,* Lederach (2010) argues for building "hubs" among actors that may hold different views but are positioned at the same level. These connections increase the capacity for change. Creating such "hubs" in Tatarstan through cooperation within civil society and with support from the population could increase the capacity of civil society to negotiate with the state.

Ideally, a mechanism for cooperation with the state has to also be co-designed by civil society. In this model, civil society can be self-regulated and reinforced rather than undermined by the state. Nevertheless, this strategy may be a daunting task to pursue and only possible if CSOs have established partnerships within Tatarstan's civil society sector and have designed a joint strategy to advocate their proposal to the state. The study participants have demonstrated

that civic action without strategy to create change makes it impossible to sustain the results of this change.

Challenging the status quo. Tatarstan's CSOs face too many limitations to have power to withstand government pressure on their own. Empowering civil society requires a supportive legal environment, independent mass media, and alternative donor support, which are currently obstructed. Civil society activists are already searching for alternative funding opportunities and using online media platforms, however, these strategies need further development. Finding partners in the private sector could also enhance civil society's capacity and increase CSOs' efficiency. The research has illustrated both the positive and negative potential of social enterprise and other forms of civil society's cooperation with the private sector (Hebb, 2012; Oloke, Lindsay, & Byrne, 2018; Pallotta, 2010; Smith, 2010). In transitional contexts, however, the private and civil society sectors have sometimes become allies in political transformation and peacebuilding (MacDonald, 2013).

Although without transforming state policies, civil society will remain restricted in its impact on governing policies, the proposed steps could strengthen the civil society sector and empower the development of a transformation strategy, and increase the support of the population. The existing instruments could be temporarily used in agreement with other activists to create strategic foundations for future cooperation. However, civil society activists cannot avoid the conversation about Tatarstan's (Russia's) political future and the need to find a consensus about civil society's role in building this future.

The proposed agenda. The following sequence of actions may be the most effective. First, it is important to establish a space and design a functional mechanism of communication for Tatarstan's CSOs. As discussed above, without a space open to all civil society activists

regardless of the sub-sector they represent, Tatarstan's civil society will be dominated by the socially oriented organizations, which now remain the only civil society sub-group represented in the Public Chamber.

Second, once civil society activists have established an inclusive space and invited representatives of all sub-sectors so that they can endeavor formulating a joint strategy. To this end, civil society activists will need to expand their knowledge of the local civil society forms and explore the work of other CSOs. Civil society activists' understanding of other sub-sectors is currently limited; having a collaborative space will allow them to broaden their perspective about the diverse civil society functions.

Third, being at the forefront of civic activism, Tatarstan's CSOs rarely have an opportunity to reflect on how their work represents the local population. Learning from the local people is a necessary step in planning a sustainable strategy for the civil society sector. The study participants have agreed that the local people have a lot to offer to civil society, yet Tatarstan's CSOs were unable to ensure broader participation of the population in civic initiatives. The lack of participation in CSOs has been partially due to the fact that the local people had not been considered in setting priorities for the civil society sector. Moving forward, civil society activists will have to uncover effective ways of learning from the local population. As some CSOs have already been more successful in engaging local people in authoring their strategies, active collaboration across the civil society sub-sectors will allow other activists to benefit from the best practices of these organizations.

Fourth, equipped with the local knowledge, activists will be better prepared to cooperate in designing a joint strategy and accountability mechanisms for the civil society sector. The importance of the joint strategy has been discussed in detail. In addition, the process of designing

a strategy is equally important as the final product. Negotiations to develop a joint strategy can strengthen partnerships and facilitate establishing practical conflict resolution mechanisms. This experience could be later applied in dealing with the private and public sectors.

Fifth, as indicated by the study participants, finding partners in the private sector is important for insuring the self-sufficiency of Tatarstan's CSOs. Although this step can be parallel to previous actions, having common priorities among the civil society activists may consolidate their efforts to boost collaboration with the private sector.

Finally, Tatarstan's CSOs will be in a better position to advocate their ideas to the government with the support of the population only after they enhance their power through the three levels of cooperation (within civil society, with the population, and with the private sector). Assessing the needs of the population may hold the key to discovering the constructive potential of Tatarstan's CSOs and in empowering CSOs to act against government repression. Above all else, all elements of this network are important to restore social connectedness, knit communities together and increase their resilience.

Research and social change. In addition to practical implications, this study has identified new avenues for future civil society research in Russia's regions. Further, this study has demonstrated the gap between the theoretical literature and the practice of civil society activism in Tatarstan. Scholars have attempted to research various forms of civil society in Russia. However, many study participants shared a common sentiment of being discouraged by published research and media coverage. They felt their voices were unheard and their efforts ignored. The divide between civil society theory and practice could be addressed by a more comprehensive study of local civil societies in Russia using inductive methodologies.

In this context, the idea of a spider web as metaphor for building and sustaining relations (Lederach, 2010) becomes increasingly important. As the researchers have argued, knowledge is an important element of power (e.g. Freire, 2000; Lederach, 2016). The collaboration between the researchers and activists has the potential to empower civil society and communicate the ideas and practices within Tatarstan's civil society and beyond it. More comprehensive and focused research on civil society activism has the potential to generate new knowledge through the interactive experiences between researchers and civil society activists. One may argue that qualitative research is limited to the experiences of the interviewees. Nevertheless, such an inductive research process lays the foundation for building relationships and stimulating reflexivity and, consequently, impacts practice.

Most importantly, the study participants argued that preparing and answering the interview questions motivated them to reflect on their practice and contemplate new initiatives and strategies. While the question about the relations between the state and civil society was expected and welcomed by all study participants, many took time to think about the question of providing local support to CSOs. This topic encouraged reflections about current recruitment and cooperation techniques. Further, the interviews motivated study participants to reflect on current civil society practices. When prompted to imagine changes in Tatarstan's civil society at the end of their interviews, the initial response was that those changes were out of the activists' control. However, several study participants took their reflections further to imagine the necessary changes within the civil society sector and between civil society and other stakeholders. These topics, in particular, revealed two important yet subtle aspects impacting civil society's potential for social change. The study participants became aware that without reconciling Tatarstan's civil

society sector and transforming its relations with the population, CSOs would continue to be limited in their ability to foster social change.

Although this study gave voice to a diverse group of local civic activists and included participants of different ethnic and gender backgrounds from the main civil society sub-sectors, the study findings may not be representative of civil societies outside of Tatarstan. Overall, the research findings contribute to the emerging literature on regional civil society in Russia and provide a foundation for more integrated studies in the future.

Limitations and directions for future research. There are several limitations of this study that can be addressed in future research. The research has demonstrated that civil society in Tatarstan is fluid. Some CSOs become inactive, civil society activists move from one organization or group to another, or they campaign for political offices or become public servants. Further, the research results are difficult to generalize to other Russian regions due to differences in their CSOs' regional development. At the same time, CSOs in Russian regions have recently experienced similar political and economic pressures, which may make their experiences more compatible with Tatarstan's CSOs. The comparison of Tatarstan's civil society with CSOs outside of Russia is also problematic, as the research conclusions are unique to the experiences of civil society activists in Tatarstan. However, the countries that have experienced rapid economic liberalization, political democratization, and disconnect between the local and international forms of civil society may also learn from Tatarstan's case.

These limitations point toward two topics to be addressed in the future. First, Tatarstan's civil society continues to evolve and requires continuous monitoring of civil society's progress. The scope of proposed changes also suggests that these recommendations can be revisited and adjusted or other steps detailed.

Second, comparative research of regional civil societies with a focus on local civil society experiences is particularly important. The research has shown that civil society activists are collaborating with each other across the regions. Most of the time, however, they have to rely on their own knowledge and anecdotal evidence. Further research is needed in particular in Tatarstan's neighbouring regions to understand whether local activists in these regions can learn from the experiences of Tatarstan's activists and vice versa. The advancement of locally-based research of regional civil societies would provide activists with the frameworks and strategies that they can relate to. In practice, such research can help in identifying the strengths of local civil societies, and in encouraging their collaboration and empowering them to design joint strategies.

Conclusion

This thesis research analyzed the role of Tatarstan's civil society in political transformation and governance, and revealed challenges and opportunities for the active participation of civil society in the governing process. Although there are a number of limitations to the role of civil society in political transformation and governance in Tatarstan, many of them can be addressed through a critical consideration of the local knowledge, and the design and implementation of a creative cooperative framework. Based on their professional experiences, the study participants elaborated on various CSOs and groups operating in Tatarstan and explored the interactions within civil society and between the different societal levels. The research participants further provided their analysis of current issues, drawing on the historical and political development of Tatarstan. They also illustrated practical tools they had previously used to overcome these common challenges.

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Appendix 1.

Letter of Introduction

Hello,

My name is Alexandra Kuznetsova and I am a Ph.D. Student in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. I am presently working on a research study exploring civil society in Tatarstan and its role in governance. I was born and lived in Kazan for many years prior to starting my Ph.D. program. I have always been fascinated by the diversity of the local forms of civic activism in our region and would love to contribute my knowledge to the successful development of the civil society sector in Tatarstan. Particularly, I am interested in the experiences of local civil society activists after the post-communist transition and how they see their role in connecting the local knowledge with the decision-making level.

With this letter, I would like to invite you to participate in my research. I would like to meet with you one-on-one in an interview scheduled at your convenience. We will discuss your own experiences of civil society initiatives in Tatarstan. The interview will take 40 minutes to one hour, and will be recorded and later transcribed by me. The transcripts will be kept in a secure place and no real names or other identifying information will be used in the notes. You will be able to read the transcripts and make changes and clarifications to your responses, or delete them if deemed necessary. I will also share with you my understanding of the project, ask for your feedback, and provide you with a brief summary of the initial results in Russian by December 1, 2017, as well as a final copy of my work in English or a brief final report in Russian.

To provide feedback during September to December 2017, we will be able to schedule follow-up meetings in person. After the completion of my fieldwork in January 2018, you will be able to contact me via encrypted messengers Telegram or Whatsapp.

If you do not wish to be a part of this project, you do not have to respond to this email with no consequence. If you are interested in being a part of this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form, indicating that you understand and agree to participate in this project. Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have at any time during or after the project.

This research has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. **If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me, my research supervisor Dr. Sean Byrne at +1 (204) 474-7979, or the Human Ethics Coordinator at +1 204-474-7122 or via email humanethics@umanitoba.ca.**

I can be reached by email at kuznetsa@myumanitoba.ca, or by telephone at ██████████.
Thank you so much for considering this invitation.
Sincerely,

Alexandra Kuznetsova, Ph.D. Candidate
252-70 Dysart Rd. University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3T 2M6
kuznetsa@myumanitoba.ca

Appendix 2.

Вступительное письмо

Здравствуйте,

Меня зовут Кузнецова Александра Витальевна, я аспирант Факультета Конфликтологии, Университета Манитобы, Виннипег, Канада. В настоящее время я провожу исследование, изучающее гражданское общество в Татарстане и его роль в государственном управлении. Я родилась и прожила в Казани большую часть своей жизни до поступления в аспирантуру. Меня всегда восхищало разнообразие местных форм гражданского активизма нашей республики, и мне бы хотелось внести посильный вклад в развитие гражданского общества в Татарстане с помощью моего исследования. В частности, меня интересует опыт активных членов регионального гражданского общества после распада Советского Союза, и как они видят свою роль в передачи знаний, полученных от жителей республики на государственный уровень.

Этим письмом я приглашаю Вас принять участие в моем исследовании. Мне необходимо встретиться с Вами один на один в удобное для Вас время и провести интервью. Мы обсудим Ваш опыт участия в гражданских инициативах в Республике Татарстан. Интервью займет 40-60 минут и будет записано мной на диктофон, а затем транскрибировано. Записи интервью будут храниться в безопасном месте, в них не будут использоваться настоящие имена или другая информация, позволяющая идентифицировать Вашу личность. Вы сможете познакомиться с записями, внести изменения и поправки или удалить любой ответ, если сочтете необходимым. Я также расскажу Вам о своем видении проекта, выслушаю Ваши комментарии и смогу предоставить Вам краткий отчет о предварительных результат исследования до 1 декабря 2017г., а также копию финальной версии мой работы на английском языке или короткий отчет на русском языке.

Вы можете внести Ваши изменения с сентября по декабрь 2017г. в ходе дополнительной личной встречи. После завершения исследовательской стадии моей работы в январе 2018г., Вы сможете связаться со мной через мессенджеры WhatsApp или Telegram.

Если Вы не хотите быть частью этого проекта, Вы можете не отвечать на этот имэйл безо всяких последствий.

Если Вы решите стать участником этого исследования, я попрошу Вас подписать форму, подтверждающую Ваше понимание и согласие на участие в проекте. Если у Вас возникнут любые вопросы в ходе этого проекта или после его окончания, пожалуйста, задавайте их.

Это исследование было одобрено Объединенным советом по исследовательской этике Университета Манитобы. **Если у Вас есть какие-либо опасения или жалобы в отношении настоящего проекта, Вы можете связаться с мной, моим научным руководителем д-ром Бёрном по телефону +1 (204) 474-7979 или с Координатором по этике по телефону +1 204 474 7122 или электронной почте humanethics@umanitoba.ca**

Со мной можно связаться по электронной почте kuznetsa@myumanitoba.ca или по телефону ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Большое спасибо за то, что рассмотрели возможность Вашего участия!

С уважением,

Александра Кузнецова, Ph.D. Candidate

252-70 Dysart Rd. University of Manitoba Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3T 2M6

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Appendix 3.

Consent Forms for Participants
Research Project: Complex Civil Society in Russia: Exploring Its Role in Political Transformation and Governance in Tatarstan

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This consent form, a copy of which I will leave you in English and Russian for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. **Please take the time to read and understand this form carefully along with any accompanying information**.

This consent form should explain to you what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you need to know more details on anything mentioned in this form or any information about this project not included in the form, please feel free to ask at any time.

Project Description: This study is being conducted because I am interested in your experiences and understanding of civil society in Tatarstan. I am interested in your thoughts and opinions about the role of civil society in governance, as well as in learning about your hopes for the future development of the civil society sector in Tatarstan. By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing to meet with me in person and to talk one-on-one about your experiences as an active member of civil society and share you vision for the future of civil society. The interview will take approximately 40-60 minutes and will be audio-taped.

Participation: At the beginning of our interview, I will collect information about your age, occupation, ethnicity, and gender. This information will be used to explain the general patterns in civil society participation and draw similarities and differences across the diverse members of the civil society sector. As I am interested in general trends, I will not put this identifying information beside your quotations. However, your gender and ethnicity would be possible to identify by your pseudonym unless you specifically ask for a gender-neutral pseudonym (e.g. Sasha, Zhenya). I will ask you if you wish to select a preferred pseudonym at the beginning of our interview. I will also place you in one of the two age groups (18 to 44 or over 45). The demographic information will not be recorded together with the interview. It will be hand-written on a separate sheet of paper, kept in a secure storage and analyzed independently from the other data as an additional anonymity safeguard. You do not have to share any of this information and can ask me to remove any of it at any time before the submission of my research.

Confidentiality: Audio recordings and transcripts will be encrypted and kept in a secure place with no names associated with them. I will not identify participants by name and remove all other identifiers (name, gender, age, ethnicity, occupation) from transcripts or any other

research-related documentation. All the data from my project will be destroyed on December 31, 2021. If you wish to review and revise a copy of your transcript, we will schedule a meeting within the two weeks after our first interview, in which you will receive a copy of it on a passworded flash drive. You can alter your transcript for any reason, including removing any information that you think could compromise your anonymity before the completion of the preliminary report on December 1, 2017 by contacting me and scheduling a follow-up meeting. If I do not hear anything from the participants within this timeframe, I will assume that no changes to transcripts are required. After you receive the preliminary report, you will be able to make changes to it in a follow-up in-person meeting, which can be scheduled during December 2017. If you need to change or remove any information after the completion of my fieldwork, you will be able to contact me via encrypted messengers Telegram or WhatsApp.

Debriefing and feedback: I will welcome any feedback on the project whether during our initial meeting or any time during the project. To provide feedback during September to December 2017, we will be able to schedule follow-up meetings in person. After the completion of my fieldwork in January 2018, you will be able to contact me via encrypted messengers Telegram or WhatsApp. I will also provide you with a brief summary of the initial results in Russian by December 1, 2017. The final written report in Russian could be send to your email as a blind copy; it will be disseminated to the Tatarstan nonprofit sector workers beyond research participants to minimize the possibility of their exposure. The summary will not contain any identifying or sensitive information.

Benefits and risks for the participants: There are no direct benefits to study participants. However, our conversation may provide you with an opportunity to reflect on the strategies and practices of political transformation and governance in Tatarstan and potentially improve them. You may also gain increased awareness of the issues facing civil society in Russia and a sense of empowerment by sharing your experiences. The results of the study will be beneficial for the broader Tatarstan community and may also relate to the civil society sectors in other regions in Russia. The research will present no direct risks to the participants in this study. However, due to a somewhat constrained political environment in Tatarstan you must be aware that email communication without encryption can be potentially compromised. Therefore, I will encourage the use of encrypted messengers for all the research-related correspondence. To minimize the risks, no names or identifiable information will be made public and only pseudonyms will be used for dissemination of data.

Dissemination: Results from this research will be published in the researcher's doctoral dissertation (Ph.D.) through the University of Manitoba. Results or parts of the results may be also disseminated in academic journal articles or in conference presentations and public lectures authored by the researcher. I will not publish the research results in any Russian media outlets to minimize the risk of exposure of the research to the government officials.

Participation in this study is voluntary with no cost to you and no remuneration.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time until I submit my dissertation to the Faculty of Graduate Studies by contacting me via encrypted messengers Telegram or WhatsApp, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. **If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact me, my research supervisor Dr. Sean Byrne, or the Human Ethics Coordinator at +1 204-474-7122 or via email humanethics@umanitoba.ca.**

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____ Participants Signature   Date _____
_____ Researcher's Signature   Date _____
_____ I would like to review and revise a copy of my transcript
_____ Please provide me with a brief summary of the initial results
_____Please send me a final summary of the results of the study to this email:
_____

Appendix 3.

Форма согласия на участие в исследовании
Название проекта: Непростое гражданское общество в России: Анализ его роли в политической трансформации и государственном управлении в Татарстане

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Это форма, копию которой я оставлю Вам на английском и русском языках, повреждает Ваше согласие на участие в исследовании и является частью процесса информированного согласия. **Пожалуйста, прочитайте внимательно этот документ и любую другую сопутствующую информацию**.

Форма согласия призвана объяснить, что представляет из себя исследование, и в чем будет заключатся Ваше участие. Вы можете задавать вопросы относительно проекта на любом его этапе, а также вопросы, касающиеся содержания этой формы или от того, что в ней не упомянуто.

Описание проекта: Я провожу это исследование, потому что меня интересует Ваш опыт и понимание гражданского общества Республики Татарстан. Мне интересно узнать Ваше мнение относительно роли гражданского общества в процессе государственного управления, а также Ваши надежды на дальнейшее развитие гражданского сектора в Республике Татарстан. Дав свое согласия на участие в проекте, Вы соглашаетесь встретиться со мной лично (одни на один) и поговорить о Вашем опыте гражданского активизма и поделиться Вашим видением будущей роли гражданского общества. Интервью займет примерно 40-60 минут и будет записано на диктофон.

Участие в проекте: В начале нашего интервью, я соберу информацию о Вашем возрасте, поле, роде занятий и национальности. Эта информация будет использована для выявления тенденций участия в гражданском обществе с целью понимания общего и особенного в деятельности различных гражданских активистов. Поскольку меня интересуют общие тенденции, я не буду помещать эту информацию рядом с Вашими прямыми цитатами. Тем не менее, Ваш пол и национальность будет возможно определить по псевдониму, если только Вы не попросите меня использовать гендерно-нейтральный псевдоним (например, Саша, Женя). Перед началом интервью я спрошу, если ли у Вас предпочтения в выборе псевдонима. Я так же отнесу Вас к одной из возрастных групп (18 до 44 или старше 45). Эта демографическая информация не будет записываться на диктофон вместе с интервью. Я запишу ее на бумаге и буду хранить отдельно в безопасном месте и анализировать

независимо от других данных в качестве дополнительной меры по обеспечению Вашей безопасности. Вы не обязаны делиться со мной этой информацией и можете попросить исключить ее на любом этапе до сдачи моей диссертации на проверку.

Конфиденциальность: Аудио записи и транскрипты интервью без имен будут закодированы и будут храниться в безопасном месте. Я не буду идентифицировать участников по именам и удалю все возможные идентификаторы (имя, пол, возраст, национальность, род занятий) из транскриптов и другой документации, связанной с исследованием. Все данные будут уничтожены 31 декабря 2021 г. Если Вы хотите проверить копию своего транскрипта, мы назначим дополнительную встречу в течение двух недель после интервью, на которой я передам Вам копию транскрипта Вашего интервью на запароленной флэшке. Вы можете внести любые изменения, включая удаление любой информации, до завершения мной предварительного отчета 1 декабря 2017г. Если Вы не свяжетесь со мной в течение этого срока, я приму это как согласие на использование всей информации в Вашем транскрипте. После получения предварительного отчета, Вы сможете внести изменения при личной встрече в течение декабря 2017г. После моего отъезда из Казани в январе 2018г., Вы сможете со мной связаться по Telegram или WhatsApp, чтобы откорректировать или исключить любую информацию.

Обратная связь: Я приветствую любые пожелания по улучшению моего исследования как в ходе нашей первой встречи и в течение всего проекта. Обратная связь в ходе сентября – декабря 2017г. возможна в ходе личной встречи. После завершения полевого этапа исследования, Вы можете связаться со мной с помощью кодированных мессенджеров Telegram или WhatsApp. Я также обеспечу Вас кратким предварительным отчетом о результатах проекта до 1 декабря 2017г. Окончательный отчет о проекте может быть отправлен на Ваш электронный адрес как скрытая копия, наряду с другими гражданскими активистами, независимо от их участия в проекте. Отчет не будет содержать имен или другой идентифицирующей информации.

Выгода и риски: Участники проекта не получат непосредственной выгоды от участия в проекте. Тем не менее, наш разговор сможет послужить возможностью для Вас оценить собственные стратегии и практики гражданского активизма в Татарстане и, потенциально, их улучшить. Вы также сможете задуматься о проблемах, стоящих перед гражданским обществом в России, и поделиться своим опытом. Результаты исследования могут быть полезны гражданскому обществу в Татарстане и, возможно, в других российских регионах.

Исследование не предусматривает непосредственных рисков для участников. Однако, учитывая политический климат в Татарстане, Вам следует знать, что незакодированная переписка может быть взломана. В связи с этим, рекомендуется использование мессенджеров, использующих кодировку, для обмена сообщениями в отношении этого проекта. С целью минимизации рисков, информация, позволяющая идентифицировать респондентов, не будет использоваться; при распространении результатов исследования будут использоваться псевдонимы.

Распространение результатов исследования: Результаты проекта будут опубликованы в моей докторской диссертации Университетом Манитобы. Эти результаты, полностью или частично, могут также быть опубликованы в научных статьях или представлены на научных конференциях или в лекциях. Я не опубликую никакие из результатов исследования в российских СМИ, чтобы сократить риск раскрытия участников проекта.

Участие в исследовании добровольное и не предусматривает ни затрат, ни вознаграждения.

Ваша подпись на этой форме демонтирует, что Вы поняли информацию о Вашем участии в исследовательском проекте и согласны участвовать в качестве респондента. Подписывая согласие Вы не отказываетесь от собственных прав. Форма не освобождает исследователей, спонсоров и других задействованных учреждений от их правовой и профессиональной ответственности.

Вы имеете право отказаться от участия на любом этапе проекта до момента сдачи диссертации на проверку, связавшись со мной по Telegram или WhatsApp, и/или отказаться отвечать на любой из вопросов, не вызывая при этом никаких последствий. Продолжение Вашего участия должно быть таким же осознанным, как и первоначальное согласие, поэтому Вы можете задавать вопросы на любом этапе Вашего участия. Университет Манитобы оставляет за собой право ознакомится с письменными записями, чтобы удостовериться, что исследование было проведено надлежащим и безопасным образом.

Это исследование было одобрено Объединенным советом по исследовательской этике Университета Манитобы. **Если у Вас есть какие-либо опасения или жалобы в отношении настоящего проекта, Вы можете связаться с мной, д-ром Бёрном или Координатором по исследовательской этике по телефону +1 204 474 7122 или по электронной почте humanethics@umanitoba.ca.**

Копия этой формы будет предоставлена Вам для личного хранения.

_____ Подпись участника   Дата _____
_____ Подпись исследователя   Дата _____

_____ Я хочу проверить и внести изменения в копию моего транскрипта
_____ Пожалуйста, пришлите мне предварительный отчет о результатах исследования

_____ Пожалуйста, пришлите мне письменный отчет о результатах проекта на электронную почту: _____

Appendix 5.

Interview/Probing Questions

1. Tell me about the (your) work of your organization
(*If you are an NGO worker, tell me about your organization and your role in it; if you are a civil society activist but not a member of an NGO, tell me about your civic activism)
    1.1 What are the goals your organization? (*your goals as an activist)
    1.2 What are some successes and challenges your organization faces? (*civic activists)

2. Overall, how would you describe the work of civil society in Tatarstan?
    2.1 How would you define civil society?
    2.2 How did the civil society sector in Tatarstan emerge and develop?

3. How do you collaborate with the population?
    3.1 What is your target group? How would you describe the interests of this group?
    3.2 How do you communicate with the representatives of this group?
    3.3 How do people participate in the work of your organization (civil society organizations in general)? Please provide examples.

4. How would you describe state – civil society relations in Tatarstan?
    4.1 What mechanisms of communication with the government does your organization use?
    4.2 How would you describe the efficiency of those mechanisms? What would you change?
    4.3 What should state – civil society relations be?

5. How do you see the future of civil society in Tatarstan?

6. If you could change only two things about civil society sector in Tatarstan, what would they be?

Appendix 6.

Вопросы для интервью

1. Расскажите, чем занимается (Вы) Ваша организация?
   (*Если Вы являетесь сотрудником НКО, то расскажите о деятельности этой НКО и Вашей в ней роли; если Вы считаете себя общественным активистом, но не являетесь сотрудником НКО, расскажите о своей деятельности, связанной с общественной деятельностью).
   1.1 Как организация гражданского общества/ общественный активист какие задачи Вы перед собой ставите?
   1.2 Каковы сложности и успехи в (Вашей) деятельности Вашей организации?

2. В целом, как бы Вы охарактеризовали деятельность и цели гражданского общества в Республике Татарстан?
   2.1 Как Вы понимаете термин гражданское общество?
   2.2 Расскажите, как развивался гражданский сектор Татарстана?

3. Как бы Вы описали Ваше взаимодействие с населением?
   3.1 На какую группу населения направлена Ваша работа? Как бы Вы описали интересы этой группы?
   3.2 Каким образом осуществляется взаимодействие с представителями этой группы?
   3.3 В целом, как бы Вы охарактеризовали поддержку населения Вашей организации (организациям гражданского общества)? Приведите примеры.

4. Как бы Вы описали взаимоотношения между государством и гражданским обществом в Татарстане?
   4.1 Какие механизмы взаимодействия с гос. структурами Вы/Ваша организация используете?
   4.2 Как бы Вы охарактеризовали их эффективность? Что бы Вы изменили?
   4.3 Каким должно быть взаимодействие гражданского общества и государства?

5. Каковым Вы представляете будущее гражданского общества в РТ?

6. Если бы Вы могли изменить всего две вещи в деятельности гражданского общества, что бы это было?

Appendix 7.

Glossary

Bolotnaya protests (also **the "white ribbon revolution", "snow revolution")** the protests of 2011-2013 in Russia against the election fraud.

Dissidents – the term dissident was used in the Soviet Union for people who were speaking up against certain features of Soviet ideology or regime.

Gazprom – is the Russian corporation that produces natural gas and oil. It holds the world's largest natural gas reserves.

Grazhdanskii activist **(civil society activist)** – one of the two terms used for civil society activists (also see *obshchestvennik*).

Intelligentsia – a social class of educated people in the Soviet Union who were the intellectual and artistic elite. In modern Russia, the old class of intelligentsia is being replaced by the "creative class", who are young well-educated and relatively well-off people from the big urban centers.

Ittifaq – the Tatar Party of National Independence *(*Russian: *Tatarskaia partiia natsionalnoi nezavisimosti).*

Likhie 90-e (**the "wild and evil 90s"**) – many Russians still colloquially call the 1990s as the "evil" time for Russia, referring to the "shock therapy" reforms, economic depression, high crime rates, political instability, and Chechen wars. To them, this period of instability came to an end with Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000.

Nashi! **(Ours!)** - is a pro-government youth movement in Russia.

Mintimer Shaimiev – the first president of the Republic of Tatarstan (1991-2010).

Rustam Minnikhanov – the second president of the Republic of Tatarstan (2010-present).

The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (Russian: *Komitet Soldatskikh Materei Rossii*) – a nonprofit organization founded in 1989 to advocate for the rights of drafted soldiers.

Obshchestvennik (civil society activist, community activist) one of the two terms used for civil society activists (also see *grazhdanskii activist*).

Obshchestvennaya organizatsiya (civil society organization) – one of the terms used to describe a civil society organization, also voluntary organization, nonprofit organization.

Otfutbolit **(pass the ball, play football)** – pass on a responsibility to deal with something (usually a complaint) to a different person or agency, to refuse responsibility.

Otpiska – is a reply from a government agency (usually to a complaint), which meets formal criteria but has no intention to address the issue.

Perestroika – was a movement to reform the Communist party in the 1980s launched by the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Russkii (Russian as an ethnicity) *vs.* *Rossiianin* (Russian as a nationality).

Shestedesiatniki – the generation of the 1960s' intelligentsia who preceded dissidents in their criticism of certain elements of the Soviet ideology and political regime.

Socially oriented organization (Russian: *sotsialno-orientirovannia organizatsia, also SONKO)* – is a nonprofit that provides social services and is not directly involved in political activity. These organizations are eligible to receive government funding.

Subekt (pl. subekty) – a federal subject. Federal subjects in Russia include republics, territories, regions, federal cities, autonomous areas, and an autonomous region.

Subbotnik (from Russian: subbota – Saturday) – an unpaid working Saturday to do volunteer but de facto mandatory work, such as cleaning public spaces of garbage.

The All-Russian People's Front (Russian: *Obshcherossiiskii narodnyi front* or *ONF)* – the government-initiated forum to consult with the representatives of the nonprofit sector.

The "foreign agent law" – is short for the law titled "On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Nonprofit Organizations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent." This law was introduced in 2012 and requires nonprofit organizations, which receive foreign donations or engage in political activity, to report themselves to the authorities.

The Public Chamber (Russian: *Obshchestvennaia palata*) is a consultative civil society institution. There are federal and a regional Public Chambers.

The State Council (Russian: *Gosudarstvennyi Sovet*) – is the regional legislature of the Republic of Tatarstan.

The State Duma (Russian: *Gosudarstvennaia Duma* also *Gosduma)* the lower house of the Russian Parliament, which is called The Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (*Federalnoe Sobranie Rossiiskoi Federatsii*).

The system of people's monitoring (Russian: *Sistema obshchestvennogo kontrolia*) – the (mostly online) systems that exist both on federal and regional levels for citizens to report government violations or any issues that require public control.

The "vertical of power" *(Russian: Vertical vlasti*) – a term coined by Vladimir Putin who sought to expand the power of the federal centre and the executive branch of power.

VTOTs - (Russian: *Vsetatarskii obshchestvennii tsentr*) – the All-Tatar Public Centre is a Tatar civil society organization, which has been advocating for the independence of Tatarstan since 1991.