
TBILISI URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: ON THE VERGE OF SUCCESS/FAILURE

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Abstract

The movements selected for the study “Defend Vake Park” and “No to Panorama Tbilisi!” developed in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, in almost one period of time. However, the results of the movements are different: the first can be attributed to the category of successful movements and the second - to the category of unsuccessful ones. By studying various secondary and primary sources and interviewing actors involved in activism, we argue that the results of selected movements were influenced by the following factors: properly planned strategy, investor/investment factor, and favorable political context.

Key words: *Urban Activism, Urban Redevelopment, Georgia, Political Context, Strategy*

INTRODUCTION

Unlike western countries, where research of social movements has been a popular subdiscipline for a decade, it is a relatively new phenomenon in post-soviet countries. Its emergence began with the weakening of the strict policies of socialist countries and the collapse of communism. Georgia, like other post-communist countries, after gaining independence (1991), faced the significant challenges of underdevelopment of state institutions, ethnic conflicts, civil war and foreign military conflicts, inflation, unemployment, and so on – simply, the crisis of statehood. It took the country more than a decade to escape this situation. Therefore, against this background, care for urban historical/cultural heritage and ecological health was less on the agenda. After the Rose Revolution (2003), various reforms were carried out in political, cultural, economic, social and other areas; After strengthening state institutions, the issue of re-urbanization of cities was gradually put on the agenda. One of the main components of modernization and re-urbanization - attracting investors and making significant investments in the development of the cities, has, over time, led to the distortion of various historical monuments or entire historic districts. At the same time, growing urbanism politics also resulted in an acute shortage of green space in the city. The given processes brought about a practically complete amortization of the historically/culturally and ecologically unique urban fabric. Finally, it resulted in urban civic activism.

Such processes are not unique to Georgia. It has become a side event of the modern world's big cities too, where usually central districts are adjusted for tourists. Zagreb Central Flower Garden Events (2006-2008), Movement Against Hamburg Renewal Policy in 2009 and Anti-Tourism Movement in Barcelona (2014) are examples of mobilization against the phenomenon of: "cities for people, cities for-profit" [Brener et al. 2012]. For our research, we have selected two cases of activism in Tbilisi (the capital of Georgia, with a population of over a million): "Defend Vake Park" and "No to Panorama Tbilisi!". The following factors conditioned the selection of the given movements: both were distinguished by the age and professional diversity of the actors involved: with (art) historians, politicians, citizens, artists, and public figures. They were developed in the same city during the same period (2013-2019), and the actors involved were virtually the same. However, the strategy, repertoire, inter and out-group communication activism, as well as the results of them, differ. Therefore, the question arises: what are the main factors influencing the divergent outcomes of these movements? Accordingly, our discussion is focused on explaining the reasons for the movements' results as the core puzzle. We have analyzed the political process and its opportunities, inter and between-group constitution, government and activist strategy, and communication between actors involved. As a result, we argue that the main factors determining different outcomes of studied movements are proper strategy, appropriate political context, and investor strength.

1. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Introducing the concept of urban social movements in the social sciences is associated with the name of Manuel Castells (1977). For him, the urban social movement is the result of the unification of trade unions, political groups, and urban organizations [Pickvance 2003]. Although Castells initially discusses it from the standpoint of Marxist theory and describes the development of urban movements as a result of class antagonism, he later expands his view to focus on collective consumption, trade unionism, human rights, and culture [Castells 1983]. Gradually, the study of the relationship between urban development and the growth of social resistance becomes even more relevant [Slater 1997; Leitner et al. 2008]. However, the research was still limited to focusing on macro effects and usually paid less attention to the connection of urban social activism with the political process [Andretta et al. 2015]. For example, for Castells (1983), a social movement's development in urban space can be formed when the actors of this movement are, at the same time, members of a more significant movement. Unlike such a macro approach, Pickvance (2008) emphasizes the need for specific political and social conditions to make a basis for civic activism development in urban space. According to Pruitt (2007), citizens try to gain control over their urban environment through urban social movements. One of the aspects of establishing this control is the achievement of urban planning through which citizens can protect their favorite places from demolition, radical change, or alienation. The study of urban and civic activism is conducted from different points of view. For collective behavior theorists, people involved in civic activism are viewed negatively; they are framed not as political actors but as irrational and socially marginalized [Buechler 2000; Della Porta, Diani 2006]. Many authors do not support this theory, for whom people involved in social movements are considered to be wholly rational and thoughtful people [Turner, Killian 1972; McCarthy, Zald 1987; McAdam, 1982]. One of the widely used approaches is to study social movements in the framework of resource mobilization theory [Wilson 1973; Tilly 1973, 1975; Gamson 1975; Oberschall 1973; Lipsky 1968;]. For example, for McCarty and Zald (1977), the aggregation of resources based on collective goals and some self-organization is essential for the success of social movements. There is always a degree of dissatisfaction in society. It is precisely the organization and articulation, as well as the representation of the interests of previously excluded groups from policy-making [Jenkins, Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978] and support of an elite group that makes it possible to mobilize support for grass-root [Turner, Killian 1972].

Another general theory in studying the results of social movements is political process theory, according to which as a stimulus and facilitator of the resistance movement is the emergence of political opportunities in the system [Eisinger 1973; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1983; Caren 2007]. Nevertheless, both theories are criticized: political process theory because of its too much focus on the political process and resource mobilization theory – because of its political leveling process. Another

important aspect is “a debate between internal and external explanations of social movement outcomes” [Giugni, 1999]. For many researchers [Gamson 1975; Clemens 1993], internal factors, particularly organizational aspects, play a significant role in the success of a movement. The combination of solid and weak group connections in organizing structure [Granovetter 1983], the adequately planned framing process [Snow et al., 1986], and the tactics of struggle used during the protest cycle [Tilly 2006], are that internal factors which play the most crucial role in the social movement’s success literature.

In contrast to giving crucial importance to internal/organizational factors, many researchers believe that external factors are the most critical determinants of a movement’s influence and success. Political circumstances [Jenkins, Perrow 1977: 70; Almeida, Stearns 1998; Eisinger 1973; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982] or as Tarrow (1998) calls it - political opportunity is the main external factor that has the most significant impact on the movement’s long-term success). Despite the wide variety of social movement theories, studying the cases we have selected for research within one particular theory/model framework is challenging. Each of the given theories is, in some respects, an ideal type that operates differently in a different space. In post-communist countries, social movements had their peculiarities, making them completely different from the Western development model [Gagy 2015].

However, is it necessary to discuss particular civic activism based on any premeditated model or theory? In the paper, we prefer to gather and analyze data focusing on processes and mechanisms rather than trying to approve pre-selected normative/teleological provisions [Castaneda 2020]. Accordingly, we will try to answer the research question based more on the empirical study of the research examples than on a particular theory.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is based on qualitative methodology. More specifically, we are using the case study strategy defined by Snow and Trom (2002) as a richly detailed, thick elaboration of the phenomenon. By triangulation of multiple methods, we have analyzed primary and secondary sources. In analyzing the secondary sources, we studied the vast Western literature on social movements and movements developed in Georgia. In addition, we have studied the decisions, statutes, treaties, agreements, or memoranda made at the central and local self-government levels related explicitly to the research issue. At the same time, we requested all the available documentation related to the selected cases from the Tbilisi City Hall and the City Assembly to analyze the communication between governmental circles and activists.

In parallel, information about current movements was mainly disseminated through online media. So we have processed articles, interviews, and announcements published around the issue in the highest-rated online media in Georgia from 2014 to 2019. (total 164 articles, statements, interviews, or information during the period of

movement development). It examined news agencies: Netgazeti, Interpresnews, Civil.ge; For.ge; Online publishing: Liberali, Tabula, et al. While information about quite all events held during the studied movements was mainly spread through the social network, we analyzed the posts, calls, materials, comments, reviews, etc. on various Facebook and Twitter pages by using content analysis. This technique helped trace debates and compared the arguments of the involved sides.

In addition, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted during the research process to recover the protest cycles fully. 15 women and 12 men aged 23-65 were interviewed. Respondents were selected based on their different involvement in the movements, roles, and attitudes. On the principle of purposefulness, respondents were selected and interviewed from the leaders and active members of each movement, including representatives of various non-governmental organizations, lowers, and members of the opposition political parties, “rank-and-file” activists selected on the snowball principle, and the investor. The anonymity of all respondents in the text is maintained. Respondents were interviewed from January 2020 to June 2020, when none of the movements studied was in the active phase.

At the initial stage of the study, a small set of a priori codes was identified. These were based on media research and included assumptions about movement strategies, communication forms of involved actors, perception of the opposite side, and solidarity among the activists. The inductive codes created for the research were: level of engagement, roles, and responsibilities, methods to protect or produce new order, timeframe, authority, metaphor, assessing others, and self-assessment. By processing and comparing the primary data obtained from interviews, we could fully identify the origins and stages of the studied movements and answer research questions.

3. POST-ROSE REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF URBAN CIVIC ACTIVISM

Activism that began in Georgia in the late 1980s took the form of a national liberation movement and lasted until the collapse of the Soviet system. Therefore, after gaining independence because of the complex social, economic, and political situation, urban development problems, and generally, “the question of cities was relegated to a side note in mainstream political discourse” [see Pluciński 2018: 655].

While discussing social movements, it is crucial to consider current socio-economic and political factors, as their combination influences the results of the movements [Saeed 2009]. Indeed, for the first time in the history of independent Georgia, the peaceful change of government in 2012 and the replacement of the previous political party in power - United National Movement (UNM) by a new political force, the “Bidzina Ivanishvili - Georgian Dream” (GD) has led to a political power shift in the city’s self-government (the UNM Mayor replacement by a representative of the GD Mayor) as well. The “Defend Vake Park” movement started during the UNM’s rule and continued after GD came to power, while “No to Panorama Tbilisi!” started and completed

during the rule of the GD. Despite radically different political beliefs and platforms, the attitudes of both political forces toward attracting investment in the tourism sector and reorganizing the cities are similar. Therefore, selected cases are studied in the context of these political processes.

In the period of UNM governance, in 2007, Georgia moved from 112th to 37th and, in 2010, to 13th place¹ in terms of doing business. It resulted from radical, far-reaching reforms for trade liberalization and improving the business environment, as well as making the country an attractive place for investors. Accordingly, unprecedentedly has increased the inflow of foreign investment in the country.²

Like the previous government for GD, it was also essential to carry out fundamental reforms for “attracting foreign investment,”³ most of which were planned to be made in tourism - the fastest-growing sector in the country. The increased tourism potential naturally meant making the cities more attractive to potential investors. In 2005, Saakashvili spoke about “the obvious interest of the biggest companies” in Georgia’s tourism potential and the construction of “the world’s largest and most prestigious hotels in Tbilisi.”⁴ The given discourse was continued by the elected GD Mayor of Tbilisi, for which one of the main arguments for constructing the Panorama Tbilisi project was the inflow of “half a billion investment, ... which is followed by the development of tourism.”⁵ The “New urbanism” [Salet 2012] - achieved as a result of foreign investments, infrastructural transformation, and active tourism development, aimed to transform the urban space from a modern city to a post-industrial city and, as a result, brought about fundamental changes. The increasing degree and cases of mobilization in urban space are usually associated with this type of economic reorganization and urban redevelopment [Feinstein and Feinstein 1985]. Also, in Tbilisi, attempts to carry out such transformation have led to the developing of two civic activism cases we intend to research. In both cases, the reason for starting the movement was the politics to make the city more attractive to tourists. On the opposite side of activism there are always authorities and investors. However, investors are different, as well as their planned investments.

Vake Park, located in the most prestigious part of the city, remains an important recreational function for Tbilisi’s inhabitants. Activism toward defending Vake Park

¹ Doing Business, Equal Opportunity for all, 2017. http://www.economy.ge/uploads/ek_ciprebshi/reitingebi/reitingebi_geo/Doing_Business_2017_-_GEO_8.12.pdf.

² Average annual growth was 9.3 percent during 2004–07. Net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows reached 16.5 percent of GDP in 2007. See. World Bank Group. 2018. Georgia from reformer to performer, p. 20 <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

³ Interview with Prime minister Giorgi Gakharia given to “Ipress” on December 17, 2020, <https://ipress.ge/new/giorgi-gakharia-pirdapiri-utskhouri-investitsiebis-mozidvis-thvalsazrisith-82-qveqhanas-s-horis-me-8-adgili-davikaveth>.

⁴ Annual summarizing speech in Parliamentary spring session by Georgia’s President Mikheil Saakashvili, 2005 <https://www.president.gov.ge/Files/ShowFiles?id=0d2119cd-37c3-4365-b36a-71d7e09ddfe7>.

⁵ As stated by Tbilisi Myer, David Narmania in 2015, July 20. <https://www.timer.ge//აზრობ-გამოხატვის-უფლება/>.

(2013) was triggered by the park rehabilitation project, according to which the construction of a 5-storey hotel in the park was envisaged.⁶ [Maghaldadze 2016]. In this case, the investor is local “Tiflisi Development.”

Another movement – “No to Panorama Tbilisi!”- was dealing with the city’s historic part. After the public announcement (2014) about the construction of the Panorama Tbilisi project, the organizations working on cultural heritage sites soon stated that this project was contrary to the regulations set by law and the World Heritage Guidelines.⁷ However, this case is distinguished from the Vake Park case for two reasons. Firstly, the Panorama Tbilisi project is the largest project ever implemented in Tbilisi, and the planned investment of more than \$ 500 million is unprecedentedly high for the Georgian reality. Secondly, the author and financial implementer of the project idea is the former prime minister, the founder of the “GD,” and an influential political figure, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, according to whom, “if not his whim no investor would agree to invest in this project.”⁸

4. GOVERNMENT STRATEGY: HOW DOES IT WORK?

The strategy used by the opposing sides involved in the process plays an essential role in the success/failure of any civic activism process. In both cases studied, the civic activist strategy is different, while the action style and strategy of the authorities are more or less similar. Between strategies used by the authorities can be outlined as follows: communication/cooperation. Social movements often emerge because of the private/public sector interdependence/cooperation. Also, protests emerge when there is a lack of dialogue-based communication and information between local governments and the citizens [Mišetić, Ursić 2010]. As it is noticed, the private and public sectors, for various reasons, are driven by common interests. The public sector should care about urban space development as its obligation. In contrast, the city’s development benefits the private sector by increasing profits [see Mišetić, Ursić 2010]. Lacking participatory political culture in newly created democracies is particularly striking, and consequently, the models of relations among the actors mentioned above are different [Gayi 2015]. Often in post-socialist countries, due to the parallel development of democracy and strict economic policies, interest in economic gain overwhelms the idea of perceiving the city as a single public space. “The Right to the City,” activism against the reconstruction of the Flower Square in Zagreb and the construction of a shopping mall in it - is one of the good proofs of the private/public partnership refusal in favor of economic interests [see Mišetić, Ursić 2010]. In Zagreb, due to the lack of dialogue and communication between the citizens and the government, there was no trust in satisfying the city’s inhabitants’ interests during the reconstruction process [Mišetić, Ursić 2010]. The situation is similar in Georgia,

⁶ It should be noted that in this same territory from the Soviet period has been located the restaurant “Budapest.”

⁷ Inicijativa sajaro sivrcistvis [Initiative for public space] 2016. Legal research. <https://bit.ly/3AKbI-Va>.

⁸ Ivanishvili interview with Guria News Agency, 2015, July 28. <https://gurianews.com/?p=730368>.

where the government has an undemocratic, unhealthy attitude toward the city's development processes and is less aware that the city is for everyone. It is a public space [Interview 3, 22, 5]. The lack of willingness of the people holding power to communicate and cooperate with the public and civil activists is evident in the cases selected for our research.

The government never took the initiative regarding public discussions and understanding the problem. Public discussions organized by the government were initiated only when everything had already been decided, what, where, and how to build; they informed us about it like news on TV. No one wanted to talk to us when we asked for a discussion. Once we went and had a picnic inside the town hall, playing badminton, reading books and lying down [Interview 5].

In the rare and often fictitious meetings between the authorities and the activists fighting to defend Vake Park, the communication style of the authorities was less directed towards solidarity and cooperation. The perception that saving Vake Park as the most crucial recreation area for the city is not a demand of one particular group of people, and it is in the interest of Tbilisi citizens - is less. "We need beds in Vake Park, not trees. That was the government's response to the fact that we lack green space in Tbilisi" Even the "simulated meetings" with the city government did not last long "because the elections coincided and the government changed" [Interview 22]. However, changing political situation causes the beginning of cooperation between the government and activists. The government's readiness for communication/cooperation usually occurs when the newly elected city self-government inherits the activism started during the previous city's self-government. In such cases, the strategy of the city government changes - it becomes relatively open for dialogue and cooperation. The coming to power of GD in 2012 made it possible to emerge a "window of opportunity" [Giugni 2009]. Despite the continuation of the protests, the movement organizers and the authorities started cooperating to rectify the situation around the park [Interview 1].

To some extent, it could be said that communication took place in the case of the "Defend Vake Park" movement. The investor directly communicated with both sides. Two primary reasons can explain this. Firstly, as GD's representative became Tbilisi Mayor, he imposed full responsibility on the previous government, stressing the issue of illegal construction in the park⁹. However, the perception that the culprit is not the investor but the state, which allows someone to buy a recreation area and start construction there [Interview 22], was less. Another factor facilitating communication was that for a GD, the investor was seen as a person close to UNM.

Consequently, the GD government stopping the construction in Vake Park could be understood in the context of getting political points. The change of government also led the investor to sit at the negotiating table because – "the government should not

⁹ Tbilisi Mayor David Narmania declares the city's self-government political decision to stop construction in Vake Park. <https://tbilisi.gov.ge/news/2881>.

be opposed. Otherwise, it will stop, destroy, and spoil you” [Interview 8]. At the same time, the investor, whom the new city government no longer supports, communicates with the activists and tries to convince them of the planned construction benefits in Vake Park [Interview 8, 22].

Unlike Vake Park, in the case of the Panorama project, factually, all kinds of communication and cooperation with the government and investor were closed entirely from the very beginning, as the “most powerful person in Georgia’s politics and the investor was the same person.” The only form of communication between the local government and civil activists was the attendance of civic activists in the process of discussing the issue at the City Assembly meeting sessions (with the support of opposition City Assembly members by making so-called passes) and “arranging noisy discussions” [Interview 4].

Changing Regulations is a well-trying strategy by the government for a planned construction site. Before the construction of Vake Park, the government changed the legislation and allowed the construction in recreational areas. Also, in the case of Panorama Tbilisi, the government, in an accelerated procedure on 2015 December 30, “made a pre-New Year present to anti-construction activists” [Interview 21] and by granting the project site the status of a “residential zone” instead of a “recreational” one, factually lays the groundwork for construction.

City governments’ other most common strategies are prolonged time and “doing nothing” [Interview 25]. The lawsuits filed by civil activists the court did not even consider for a long time. Finally, after reviewing them - in the case of Panorama, due to procedural violations did not enter into production, while in the case of Vake Park did not meet the requirements of the plaintiff. The prolonging of time by the authorities was a well-calculated and purposeful action because, as one activist pointed out, “they also have lawyers and know that a loss of legal interest can lead to lawsuit neglect” [Interview 27]. Accordingly, neglecting the rallies and various forms of protest is a well-calculated step by the government. Because “the best way to quell a protest is to do nothing and wait. People do not continuously stand on the street. Because usually, a person wants to go home, to be with family, to work” [Interview 25].

Creating an informational vacuum - In obtaining a construction permit for Panorama, the regulations were sent to the members of the City Assembly late or not at all. So “sometimes the members of the City Assembly did not even know what they were going to discuss [Interview 18]. Consequently, virtually all procedural issues were discussed in just a few days without any problems or questions. However, there were cases when, despite the delay of the regulations and the government’s attempt to raise the issue with less noise, the civil activists managed to get information from opposition parties and attend the hearings, as a result of which “there was a lot of noise and clashes” [Interview 15]. Since the activists still managed to get information and were protesting it in the City Council, “the government acted cunningly, and the City Assembly procedurally avoided this responsibility handing it over to the

government which approved it” [Interview 13]. Another manifestation of the attempt to create an information vacuum is the government’s appeal only about the project’s potential benefits, bypassing all negative aspects. Manipulating social issues is one good example of this. In a country where unemployment is one of the main problems, the government actively advocated the Panorama Tbilisi project with the emphasis on “creating 25,000 temporary and permanent jobs” [Interview 14] as well as promising locals “apartments in a new building” [Interview 16].

Marginalization of protesters. Sewing NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard)¹⁰ labels for urban transformation protesters is a common fact. Authorities are trying to get activists to wear the NIMBY label while trying to gain public attention and disperse the validity of the label, considering these people to be enemies of the common good [Andretta et al. 2015]. In the cases selected for research, the government tried to portray construction opponents as enemies of development as they “want to stop construction in Georgia. They want to destroy the country; they are pests and do not hide it.”¹¹ On the other hand, activists must repel these labels, “it is as if someone wants to improve the city, but we are against development. It is not true - we are development supporters [Kevanishvili 2015]. In addition, in portraying activists as enemies of progress and development, one of the most active methods of marginalization is to refer to activists as the main opposition political party – UNM supporters. This strategy is actively used against the “No to Panorama Tbilisi!” movement, as the project and activism against it are planned, started, and developed under the GD government. Activists were baptized as UNM “neurotic politicians’ thoughts” supporters.¹² At the same time, activists were accused of lying. This method is used especially concerning the negative conclusions about Panorama construction by international organizations such as “Save Europe’s Heritage”, “Europa Nostra”, “World’s Monuments Fund”, “Edinburgh World Heritage”, and ecc.¹³ The Tbilisi Mayor declared that some forces¹⁴ had misled these international organizations. Governmental manipulation of the issue is also evident in the case of Vake Park when the developer offers the newly arrived city government to cooperate and make concessions. However, given the political game, the government is arranging to “raise the community” (Interview 8) around the construction in Vake Park and use it to discredit the former UNM government.

¹⁰ Macmillan dictionary. <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/nimby>.

¹¹ Stated Bidzina Ivanishvili, 2019. Tabula, July 17 <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/627922-ivanishvili-aba-nakhet-panoramaze-ra-dgheshi>.

¹² Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili’s statement <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/455514-giorgi-kvirikashvili-tbilisshi-ketdeba-istoriuli-proekti-romelic-shekmnis-martlac-analogis-armkone-mcvane-sivrces-bizina-ivanishvili-ar-imsaxurebs-imas-rasac-igebs>

¹³ International Organizations Are Protesting Panorama Project.” 2015. September 21 <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/578399-saertashoriso-organizatsiebi-panorama-tbilisis>.

¹⁴ Tbilisi Mayor David Narmania’s statement <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/352061-davit-narmania-panorama-tbilisis-proektze-arasamtavroeb-xelovnurad-shecdomashi-iqvn-sheqvanili/>

5. INTERNAL FACTORS: REPERTOIRE AND STRATEGY

The protest repertoire is one of the main elements of activism. Unlike the government, the action strategy of the activists has not been uniform and similar, nor has it always been consistent.

In the history of civil activism in independent Georgia, virtually all forms of activism repertoire were mainly built on rallies and various protest gatherings. Similarly, the repertoire used in the case of Vake Park, at the initial stage, was also of a more traditional type - rallies, pickets, setting up tents, as one of the organizers noticed: “We would go to the construction fences, shake them with all our might, and try to break them down” [Interview 31]; However, the initial form of protest has gradually changed and took fully creative form: theatrical performances were staged, exhibitions and various creative types of lessons were held - drawing, the printing of stencils, open lecture-seminars. According to the activists themselves, the transformation of the repertoire was influenced by the successful experience of an entirely positive type of activism repertoire used in the “Save Gudiashvili Square” case.¹⁵

People were tired and are still tired of this negative and swearing because it does not work, and people know it does not. Because there have been many attempts to achieve things this way, it has never worked. On the contrary, we saw what and how it was in Gudiashvili Square [Interview 5].

So it became activism with a positive repertoire of “enthusiast people who wanted to change” [Interview 10]. It allowed them to express their attitudes and feelings towards the city because, as Castells [1983: 326] notes, “people tend to consider cities, space and urban functions and forms as the mainspring for their feelings.”

In contrast, of the cases mentioned above, the message box of the actions against the Panorama construction was unequivocally negative (it is interesting that the name of the activism itself, unlike another studied case, was built not on the positive- defend/ save something, but on the neglect - no to something). It is true that “the repertoire of collective action will differ in different contexts” [Jacobsson 2016: 7]. It was the same in this case. Although the main forces involved in Panorama’s activism are the same as in the case of Vake Park, the context is entirely different. If in Vake Park “the investor is an ordinary businessman” [interviewer 4], in the case of Panorama Tbilisi, “the enemy was too powerful, the most powerful actor in Georgian politics - Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Moreover, this movement was against his most special interests” [Interview 12]. Accordingly, in contrast to the case discussed, the deviation from positive to negative repertoire occurred because, according to the protest organizers, “with concerts and songs, we could not harm Ivanishvili.” Accordingly, the wholly negative repertoire

¹⁵ One of the rare exceptions was the movement „Save GudiashviliSquare,” developed in 2009-2015 and directed to protecting the oldest complex of XIX century buildings in the center of old Tbilisi. In addition to the fact that this is the longest and probably the most successful movement in the history of modern Georgia, it is distinguished by its fully positive protest repertoire unknown to the Georgian reality.

of this movement was aimed at the complete political and moral discrediting of the project supporters and authority in general. “It was ordinary bullying with attaching labels such as homeland seller, sold to Ivanishvili, enslaved, and so on” [Interview 6]. *Informing population.* While the number of participants involved in the protest is critical, researchers often emphasize the importance of protesters’ diversity [Wouters, Walgrave 2017]. In any case, properly informing citizens has great importance. In the case of Vake Park, along with the proper strategy, the active involvement of the population in the process was mainly because toward Vake Park, Tbilisi citizens have particular emotional sentiments which, in many cases, date back to childhood [Interview 31, 5]. Additionally, Vake Park, located in one of the most elite areas of Tbilisi, was the only well-equipped park in Tbilisi, which is not distinguished by the abundance of green spaces and large parks.

Consequently, the citizens of Tbilisi had little need to explain the importance of Vake Park. Therefore, the opinion that “Vake Park was protected because it was a Vake Park, public involvement was large, and probably more serious figures were involved in this protest” [Interview 23] does not seem ungrounded. In the case of Panorama, the number of citizens involved in the protest was relatively small. Several factors could cause this.

On the one hand, propaganda by the government to portray the benefits of construction was very active; On the other hand, there was a lack of a clear strategy for raising public awareness and engagement. So, the propaganda of the goodness of construction was active. One of the participants noticed that the government was much more active than “our small education-oriented activities” for the population [Interview 23]. Even the part of the population that would potentially suffer as a result of the project implementation - was not intensively involved in the protest.

On the contrary, as one of the activists pointed out, “authorities promised certain amounts to the population. These people saw huge constructions from the windows of their houses, and nevertheless, they were asking us to protest against the construction” [Interview 4]. At the same time, because of this project implementation, nothing would be destroyed, new facilities would build, significant investments would be made, and jobs would create - played a significant role too. Consequently, in this case, the part of the population for which the re-modeling of the city is a source of benefit and economic prosperity [Andretta et al. 2015] has been overrun.

6. CIVIC ACTIVISM: INTRA AND BETWEEN-GROUP CONSTITUTION

Both cases we have studied are also exciting regarding the intra-group constitution. Many associations and organizations participated in the activism for the protection of Vake Park. However, the single “Guerilla Gardeners” was the initiator and the main organizer of this civic protest. Although, at the local level, the change of city government and the arrival of a new political force led to some intra-group disagreements among the forces involved in the Vake Park movement. According to activists involved

in the protest, activism was alienated from people who, factually, were fighting for political change and not for the sake of saving Vake Park, “they had one goal - to fight the UNA” [Interview 22]. Intra-group confrontation also took place personally, which was explained by the desire to present oneself and gain more visibility and popularity on TV media [Interview 8]. Nevertheless, the unity of the central organizing group of activism was not broken, and the given facts did not affect the overall result.

Generally, the actors involved in social movements and the movements themselves are often neither closely related nor consistently coherent [Castaneda 2020]. It is perhaps most notable in Panorama’s case, which was best illustrated regarding the differences between the groups organizing the protest. The driving force of the process became “Ertad” (together) - the unity of 27 civil society organizations and citizens with different visions, ideological and political beliefs. So one of the disadvantages of this union was its fragmentation and lack of unity.

We thought the Panorama was a topic we could close our eyes to and unite, and we did. This union did not work with other cases - it was created and ended up in Panorama. Because it was the unity of very different associations, gathering people who did not even say “hello” to each other [Interview 7].

On the one hand, active left-wing groups’ appearance at protest meetings with their flags and symbols became the subject of sharp intra-group confrontation. It was unacceptable because “realistic issues were to be resolved in communal politics, and it was more important than the ideological platforms of these people” [Interview 10]. On the other hand, there were activists identified by left-wing groups as neoliberal forces who “everyone knows what they were fighting for – only buildings and landscapes and not surviving ordinary people [Interview 30]. Finally, the method used in the case of “No to Panorama!” - to unite people despite their political and ideological beliefs did not work. So “this union was created and completed in Panorama” [Interview 22].

Although some researchers believe that the involvement of politicians in social activism is an inevitable and positive fact [Andretta et al. 2015], activists’ attitudes towards the involvement of political parties in the protest movement have not been uniform. In studied cases, the involvement of politicians in the protest campaign among ordinary activists was unacceptable. They believed the government could easily use it to discredit the movement and marginalize its members.

We thought that it was unacceptable to cooperate not only with politicians but also with political parties. Because as soon as you collaborate with specific political parties, your motivation is immediately questioned, and you become a person obsessed with the desire to gain power. Also, nobody trusted them. We all remember the past and do not want to associate with these people [Interview 5].

In contrast to this, people who planned and led the activism process, especially in the case of “No to Panorama Tbilisi!” realized that without politicians’ involvement, the movement’s success was impossible

Politicians should not approach us - this opinion is nonsense. Suppose 1000 or even three hundred people are standing on the street. It is a political process, especially if you are protesting something against a billionaire and the most powerful person in the country. A politician is also an ordinary person, and the more people he stands with - the better for him and common business [Interview 6].

Despite these different visions, cooperation between politicians and activists still took place. In the case of “No to Panorama Tbilisi!” civil activists were receiving information about the discussion of the issue in the City Assembly from its opposition political party members. By obtaining the so-called permits, they could attend the gatherings while discussing the issue and had very close coordination. As noted, institutional political actors are ready to aid activists when they benefit from it [Kane 2003; Almeida and Stearns 1998]. Usually, this is a political benefit, as in the case of “No to Panorama Tbilisi!” As one of the members of the opposite political party noticed

We both needed each other, and we both helped each other. You remain a political opponent of society and may not even be listened to. When you are concerned about an issue and are interested in harming the image of the most influential person in Georgian politics, you must ensure that the activists who are more likely to be listened to by citizens - are involved. So they needed to have detailed information [Interview 13].

7. COULD IT BE SOMETHING DONE BETTER? – ACTIVIST’S CONCEPTIONS

There is no uniform attitude among people involved in activism about the appropriateness of the strategy, repertoire, and forms of activism. While in the case of Vake Park, according to activists, the form and ways of protest were more thought out, the case of Panorama was different.

It was more an activist struggle and no long-termed, planned, and strategic struggle. A noise, a scream started. However, usually, governments stifle this shouting. They can marginalize the activists and tell them that they are a representative of that political party, and that is why they are shouting [Interview 6]

Even more, there are different conceptions of whether activist struggle has positive results, and if yes – what? While according to the mayor of Tbilisi, “Vake Park von and nothing will be built on this particular site”¹⁶ The future of any constructions in Vake Park is still vague. On the one hand, according to some activists, “from now on, all authorities will know -if they promise to build something in Vake Park, they will still receive protest” [Interview 5].

On the other hand, some of the organizers are more skeptical - in the case of a change of government, no one knows what the new government will do. Everything will depend on the “goodwill of newly elected city authorities” [Interview 9].

¹⁶ Nothing will be built in Vake Park– Kakha Kaladze, January 25, 2019, <https://reginfo.ge/politics/item/12145-vakis-parkshi-araperi-ar-ashendeba-%E2%80%93-kaxa-kalawe>

Assessment of the Panorama Tbilisi activism results is also different. Most of the involved actors evaluated it as a failed movement. Moreover, according to one organizer, the authorities razed them to the ground as if they had never existed” [Interview 25]. However, some actors involved, primarily politicians, think it is possible to distinguish several positive outcomes. In addition to attracting media and public attention and unifying citizens with different political views, the most important result was discrediting the government [Interview 21].

Could it be done something differently? Naturally, the actors’ perceptions are also different in this regard. In studied cases, several lawsuits have been filed in court. However, without any results because “the court is when the court is under the control of the authority, you cannot achieve results” [Interview 11]. Nevertheless, according to some activists

This incredulity can only be countered with arguments, which were very difficult to obtain. Some professionals were begging for a lawyer to come and handle these arguments. It is not easy to translate the arguments of art historians into legal arguments. We began doing this too late [interview 13].

While discussing the results of activism, intragroup similarities/differences can be considered an additional determining factor. In the case of the Vake Park movements, the protest was headed by Guerilla Gardeners, within which there was no confrontation and different opinions about the repertoire and tactics of action. At the same time, in the case of Panorama Tbilisi, there was a lack of intergroup consolidation and partnership [Tsuladze et al., 2017]. Even more, “It was not only a gathering of ideologically different people. But these people did not even say” hello” to each other” [Interview 22]. This difference was naturally reflected in the strategy of the movement. While some organizers believed that activism could not be successful without politicians, others had a different opinion.

We thought that it was unacceptable to cooperate with the existing political parties. Because as soon as you start partnering with them, your motivation immediately comes into question. No one trusted them, and nobody wanted to be associated with these people. Only once was there a severe discussion - whether we should let the politicians or not, and this discussion broke up together [Interview 3].

Of course, the controversy over the involvement of politicians is not the only factor determining the results of the Panorama Tbilisi movement. The political situation and the strength/weakness of the investor are essential factors that are identified by all participants involved in the activism process.

Let us imagine that only one organization had done the activism; the result would have been the same. It would happen in all cases, whether one organization would object to it or ten –because the investor was the most influential person in Georgian politics. At the same time, the political situation was beneficial to the government. The Georgian Dream was relatively new to the government, trust was high, and “Ivanishvili charm was then a big factor” [Interview 14].

CONCLUSION

Although both movements we studied developed with the same actors over the same period, their results differ. Based on the analysis of the given movements, we can assume that their results were influenced by both external - independent from the campaign and internal, inter/between-group factors. The analysis of the given cases showed that among the factors that played an essential role in the success of Defend Vake Park one could be outlined: a well-planned action strategy. It was largely conditioned by internal group unity, proper presentation of the problem to the citizens, unequivocally positive repertoire of protest, refusal to involve politicians in the process, and, finally, the emergence of the window of political opportunity. In contrast, Panorama Tbilisi's incoherent, inconsistent, and uniquely disruptive tactics (the result of intra-group differences and disagreements), and ineffective public awareness, played a particular role in the movement's failure.

Favorable political context [Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Almeida and Stearns 1998] is among the most critical factors influencing social movements' results. In our studied cases, the advantages/disadvantages of the political process played a significant role. In the Vake Park case (the partially successful case), the government of the GD has replaced the national government, and the political spectrum of city self-government has also changed. The political process of changing the ruling party had a different impact on the cases studied. As long as the UNM government issued the reconstruction/construction permits in Gudishvili and Vake Park, it was politically advantageous for the new government to meet activists' demands in this area. "The elections were coming; GD representative should have become mayor" [Interview 17]. It would not be easy to discuss the movement's success if this possibility did not appear.

In contrast, in the case of Panorama Tbilisi, the investor was financially and politically influential, and the political context was unfavorable to the movement's success. Finally, as a factor influencing the outcome of the movements, the strengths/weaknesses of investors (however, in social activities theories, less attention is paid to it) could be added. In the case of Vake Park, the investor was not sufficiently strong that it became possible to refuse it. In the case of "No to Panorama Tbilisi!" along with activists' intra- group division and unfavorable political context, the planned unprecedented investment can be considered as one of the main reasons for activism's defeat.

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