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Democracy and Development in the Making:
Civic Participation in Armenia; Challenges, Opportunities

a dissertation submitted to the doctoral school of local development and global dynamics in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctoral degree (Ph.D.) in Local Development and Global Dynamics

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# Abstract

This research focuses on civic participation and its role in an emerging democracy context, and examines the forms, patterns, trends, obstacles to and opportunities for civic participation, as well as the impact of civic participation on democratization and development processes in Armenia, a post-soviet country in the South Caucasus, that has embarked on simultaneous transition toward democracy and free market economy since its independence in 1991.

The dissertation suggests that civic participation is a key ingredient for successful transformations and effective reforms in both political and economic sectors in the post-soviet context of Armenia, and, therefore, more attention, as well as more vigorous efforts and resources should be directed to building civic capacity of the people and organizations in this setting. It is argued, that while, obviously, not a panacea for all development and democratization related challenges, civic engagement has a strong potential to foster those processes and contribute to the achievement of more effective, inclusive and sustainable solutions in the areas of democracy promotion and development in the transition countries.

The original contribution of the thesis is an empirical study of civic participation in Armenia and assessment of its determinants and the impact on democracy and development related outcomes in the country.

The primary research includes a study of civic participation in 10 rural and small urban communities across the country, and provides comprehensive information and insights into civic participation forms, pattern, determinants, obstacles and opportunities at the community level.

Civic participation is further studied by examining the major civic initiatives and campaigns that took place in the country over the recent five years (2010-2015) and assessment of their outcomes and impact.

The study looks closely at the determinants of civic participation, both the individual level factors and the obstacles and opportunities provided by the institutional context, and, in particular, examines the relationship of civic participation with social capital, civic education, and use of internet and communication technology (ICT).

Civic participation habits and trends among the youth are explored by means of surveys conducted in 2013 and 2014. An innovative measure – a Civic Participation Score (CP Score) is introduced and computed, based on a pre-defined and operationalized set of indicators, and a Civic Participation Index (CP Index) is calculated for monitoring the changes, in separate indicator categories and overall, and analysing civic participation trends over time.

The research sheds light on civic participation practice and trends in Armenia and builds a framework for analysis of civic engagement in an emerging democracy context, by identifying the participants, their motives, forms of civic engagement, its impact, as well as challenges and opportunities for participation. The study highlights the specific needs and opportunities for further civic capacity building and lays down a roadmap for further research and action in this direction.


Keywords: civic participation, democracy, development, social capital, transition countries

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

AA- Association Agreement

AED – Academy for Educational Development

AMD – Armenian Dram

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

CB – Caucasus Barometer

CBA - Central Bank of Armenia

CBO – Community Based Organization

CC - Constitutional Court

CCE – Center for Civic Education

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

CF  - CIVILITAS Foundation

CI – Counterpart International

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CIS- Commonwealth of Independent States

CJST – Closed Joint-Stock Company

COE –Council of Europe

COI - Citizen Observer Initiative

CP - Civic Participation

CSI – Civil Society Index

CRRS - Caucasus Research Resource Centers

CSO(s) – Civil Society Organization(s)

DCFTA - Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

ENA - Electric Networks of Armenia

ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy

EPF - Eurasian Partnership Foundation

EPDE – European Platform for Democratic Elections

EREA – European Regional Educational Academy

EU- European Union

FINCA – Freedom of Information Office in Armenia

FH - Freedom House

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Society for International Cooperation

GNI - Gross National Income

HDR – Human Development Report

ICT – Internet and Communication Technology

IDEA- Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

IDHR – Institute for Development and Human Rights

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IREX – International Research and Exchanges

IWPR – Institute for War and Peace Reporting

JAA - Junior Achievements of Armenia

MDGs - Millennium Development Goals

NA – National Assembly (Armenian Parliament)

NCOC - National Conference on Citizenship

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

NHC- Norwegian Helsinki Committee

NIE – National Institute of Education

NSS – National Statistical Service

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PACE – Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe

PC - Personal Computer

PPP – Public Private Partnership

PSRC - Public Service Regulatory Commission

PRSP – Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

RA – Republic of Armenia

RFE/RL – Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty

SMEs –Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

TACIS – Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States

TI – Transparency International

UK - United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

UN - United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

USA – United States of America

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USA - United States of America

USD – United States Dollar

US – United States (of America)

WSJ – (The) Wall Street Journal

WVS – World Value Survey

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# INTRODUCTION

## *The Context*

Over the last quarter of a century, democratic transformation and democracy building and promotion have been high on the agenda of many governments, as well as the international community, that has been vigorously promoting the spread of liberal democracy to former totalitarian and military states. "The third wave of democracy" (Huntington 1991) spread from countries in Latin America and Asia (1980-es) to the post-soviet countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (1986-1991), that proclaimed themselves democracies following the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

A decade later, in 2010-2011, democracy made yet another dramatic comeback that was labelled by some scholars as "the fourth wave of democratization" (e.g. Diamond 2011), when protests grew against the autocratic regimes and revolutions broke out across the Arab world, giving rise to 'Arab Spring' (2010-2012). The waves of democratization reached also a number of post-soviet countries, such as Kyrgyzstan (in 2010) and Ukraine (in 2014), where popular protest against the increasingly authoritarian governments gave birth to uprisings and revolutions that toppled the ruling regimes.

Democratic transformation, however, is not a smooth and linear process, and does not occur overnight. History and a large body of literature available on the subject testify that it is a long and complicated enterprise, where some progress can be intertwined with setbacks, and backlashes may occur (e.g. Carothers 2006; Keane 2009; Freedom House 2014). Waves of democratization may be followed by reversals (Huntington 1991), as, for instance, demonstrated by the rise of 'illiberal democracies' or 'hybrid democracies' across the world, including in many of the post-soviet transition countries.

Democratization is an on-going process and requires consistency in efforts, constant improvement, interaction and will, both on the part of the states and the citizens.

Citizen participation is recognized as an important attribute and one of the main pillars underpinning the institution of democracy. In a democracy, citizens acquire not only rights and freedoms, as it is commonly known, but also responsibilities and duties – participation in the political and civic lives through voting during elections, creating and joining associations, taking

part in decision-making and policy formation, demanding transparency and holding the governments accountable, to name a few.

Over the last decade, as a part of democracy promotion initiatives, numerous international organizations launched and carried out projects and interventions aimed at assisting the democratization efforts through fostering civic participation or civic engagement in the new democracies around the world.

The concept of civic participation grew to prominence and became a subject of renewed attention from scholars and practitioners alike.

Indeed, the importance of civic participation for democracy promotion and development related decision-making in any democracy, especially an emerging one, cannot be overestimated. The level and magnitude or civic participation, the overall civic health and civic capacity of the population are among the decisive factors that affect the quality of democracy and effectiveness of development efforts.

There is a large body of literature and related research testifying to the failures and blunders in development interventions around the 'developing world' that have been caused by the mere lack of participation and involvement of citizens in decision-making and development processes. The same holds true in regards with the local governments' development plans and agendas, which often ignore people's priorities, views and concerns, and, as a result, fail to deliver improvement or progress.

Citizen participation in decision-making on the issues affecting their lives, collaboration with the local government, participation in the community meetings and discussions can result in a more effective use of the resources by directing them to priority areas and designing more informed, effective and sustainable policies, thereby contributing to the development agenda too. This is particularly relevant, as many of the democracies that sprang in the post-soviet space, also embarked on the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy and struggled for many years to revive their economies and improve the overall well-being of their populations. These targets still remain unattained in the majority of these countries.

The evidence on civic participation, its practice, trends and tendencies in the developed and developing countries, new and old democracies, is however, mixed. The ambiguities and

differences start from the definition of the term, from what it entails and how it can be measured, and continue to views on its availability, increase or decrease in a certain country over a certain period of time and its significance for democracy and development (e.g. Putnam 2000; Fahmy 2006, Dalton 2004, 2008, etc.).

While there has been certain research on civic participation, civic health, its indicators and overall role in established democracies in Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia, the subject is somewhat neglected and under-researched in case of Eastern European and the post-soviet 'emerging' democracies, where the concepts of democracy, civic participation and 'democratic citizenship' are still relatively new.

This research aims to fill that gap and examine civic participation (forms, patterns, trends, obstacles, opportunities), its determinants and impact on democratization and development processes in an emerging democracy and transition economy context, focusing on Armenia, a small post-soviet country in the South Caucasus, which offers an illustrative example of the post-socialist experience with simultaneous transformation of its political system and economy, representing a good case for study and deriving lessons for further policy and development practice.

In this dissertation, the term *'civic participation'* is interchangeably used with *'civic engagement/citizen engagement'*, *'citizen participation'* and *'civic activism'*, to denote involvement of individuals or groups of individuals in the public sphere through a range of activities, such as voting, volunteering, taking part in community meetings, petitioning the government, collaborating with local authorities on community issues, demonstrating, protesting against decisions, protecting own or others' rights and interests, and otherwise participating in public affairs.

As civic participation is taking place in a specific context and is largely conditioned and affected by the latter, the research touches upon the institutional setting, general policies, trends and progress with development, civil society building and democratization in Armenia.

While examining civic participation, the study also focuses on its determinants – the main factors contributing to or constraining civic participation at both individual and contextual levels.

In scholarly literature, civic engagement is often discussed in close relationship with (or sometimes even equated to) the notion of social capital (e.g. Putnam 2000), which, in a nutshell, can be described as the tangible (e.g. contacts, information) and intangible (e.g. trust, norms, etc.) resources embedded in one's social connections and networks. It has been found that social capital can be beneficial for both civic engagement and local development of communities (Putnam 1993, Krishna 2008, etc.). Therefore, the research also tackles the issue of availability of social capital and its relationship with civic participation in post-soviet Armenia.

Other important determinants of civic participation, as argued by this dissertation - civic or democratic citizenship education and diffusion and use of Internet and communication technology (ICT) are researched and their relation with civic participation is examined in the context of Armenia.

The original contribution of the research is a comprehensive empirical study of civic participation and its characteristics - forms, patterns, impact, determinants, trends, obstacles and opportunities in the post-soviet setting of Armenia.

Thorough research of the available resources on the subject has been carried out, as a result of which "Civic Health" tool, designed and applied widely across various states in the USA by the think-tank National Conference on Citizenship (NCOC), has been chosen for adaptation and application in an emerging democracy context. Additionally, a Civic Participation Score and Index have been devised to enable comparison of civic participation and its trends in Armenia and elsewhere.

My experience of work in the Armenian communities (I worked as a Project Specialist on a USAID[1] funded Youth and Community Action Project (YCAP), under USAID's Governance and Democracy portfolio, from 2007-2009), insider knowledge of the issues the communities and civil society groups deal with on the ground, knowledge of the language, the legislative framework, the main actors and networks of civil society, public sector and international organizations working in this field, add up to the factors that condition the choice of the country, and contribute to a more informed discussion and analysis of the issues under research.

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[1] United States Agency for International Development

It should be noted that this research does not concern itself with the issue of conductivity of a democratic regime to economic development; there is plentiful literature, analyses, debates, contested evidence and contradictory views on that topic (e.g. Menocal 2007, etc.), especially since the economic growth in China soared over the recent decade. This dissertation, rather, takes as a given the context of democratization in Armenia, and studies the manifestations and the role of civic participation for the current reforms in that specific setting.

## Armenia: Brief Country Profile and Background

*Figure 1: Map of Armenia*



*(Source: CIA World Factbook, 2014)*

*Fact sheet:*

| | |
|---|---|
| Territory: 29,743 km$^2$ | Human Development Index: 0.73 |
| Population: 3.006 million; | 87th – High Development (UN 2016) |
| GDP: $11.60 billion; | Gini Index: 33.8[2] |
| GDP growth: 3.5 % | Population below poverty line: 32% |
| GDP per caita: $6300 | |
| GNI per capita: $4.020 | (RA NSS[3], World Bank 2016) |

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[2] Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, Gini index of 100- represents perfect inequality

Armenia is a small, landlocked country, located in the South Caucasus, at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. To the north, it borders with Georgia, to the west – with Turkey, to the east- with Azerbaijan and the *de facto* independent, but officially unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh (NK) (Artsakh), to the south – with Iran and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan.

Official language is Armenian, created in 405 by Mesrop Mashtots.

More than 95% of the population follow (practice or identify themselves with) Christianity (Armenian Apostolic Church), which was adopted as the state religion as early as in 301.

National currency is Armenian dram (AMD): 1 AMD = 0.0021 US dollar (as of March 2016).

About 96% of the population of the country are ethnic Armenians, with some Yezidi, Russian, Assyrian, Greek, Georgian, Kurdish, Ukrainian, and other ethnic minorities (RA NSS 2014).

Armenia has a large Diaspora outside the country, formed over centuries as a result of loss of statehood and foreign occupations, the Armenian Genocide - mass extermination of Armenians and deportation from their ancestral lands in Eastern Anatolia by Ottoman Turks in 1915-17, as well as out-migration from Armenia during the first years of its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. While there are around 3 millions of Armenians living in Armenia today, more than 8-10 million of Armenians, according to various sources, live outside the country, with the largest communities in Russia (an estimated 2.5 million of Armenians), USA (1.5 million) and France (50000). The Armenian Diaspora ("Spyurk") has played a distinctive role in the country's political and economic lives since Armenia's independence in 1991. In particular, the Armenian Diaspora in the USA has been influential in terms of lobbying for aid and support from foreign governments, as well as lobbying for recognition of the Armenian Genocide committed by Ottoman Turks in 1915. Although the Armenian Diaspora in Russia has been largely disengaged from politics, the remittances sent to Armenia from Russia have accounted for a sizeable portion in the country's GDP since its independence (CBA 2006). In general, the Armenian Diaspora's role has been prominent in the matter of the country's survival and overcoming the economic crisis in 1991.

Armenia is currently a semi-presidential republic, with reforms underway for transitioning to a parliamentary system.

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[3] Republic of Armenia National Statistical Service

President is elected by a popular vote every five years (eligible for 2$^{nd}$ term). The Constitution was adopted on July 5, 1995 (amended in 2005 and 2013). According to the principles of a democratic state, the power is divided into three branches: legislative (unicameral Parliament – the National Assembly), executive (the RA[4] Government headed by the Prime-Minister and 18 Ministers) and judicial (courts of three instances and the Constitutional Court).

President - Serzh Sargsyan (since April 2008; re-elected in 2013 by 58.6% of vote)

Prime-Minister – Hovik Abrahamyan (since April 2014).

Territorial administration unit in Armenia is Marz (region). The country is divided into 10 Marzes (regions) administered by Marzpets (Governors), assigned by the Prime-Minister, and the capital city of Yerevan, which has a status of a separate Marz, comprised of twelve communities.

Currently, there are 926 units of local government – communities - in Armenia, 48 of which are urban and 865– rural (www.mta.am). All the communities are managed by Mayors and Community Councils, elected by direct suffrage for a 4-year term.

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Over the course of the previous quarter of a century, Armenia has been struggling its way toward economic development and democratization, introducing and implementing numerous reforms, attempting to transform the existing institutions and create new ones that would be better suited for addressing the norms enshrined in the adopted Constitution and other legislation, building its economy from literary a scratch, and attempting otherwise to handle the demands and challenges of the times in this era of globalization, increasingly 'shrinking' borders and 'flattening' world, rapidly occurring technological advances and 'internetization'.

Choosing the course of European integration, since its independence in 1991, Armenia has ratified all the major international conventions on human rights protection and reflected the standards and requirements of the international treaties in its legislation.

Armenia has been a member of the Council of Europe (COE) since January 2001, and has been actively cooperating with European Union (EU) in a variety of directions and areas, including political dialogue, legislation, trade, economy, investment, culture, etc.

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[4] Republic of Armenia

However, having assumed a form of a democratic and European value-based state, Armenia has not been able to attain the content of such a state and translate the regulations and standards stipulated by the laws into reality.

Armenia's road to democratization and development has been fraught with numerous challenges and setbacks. Past legacies, weak institutions, high poverty and unemployment rates, profound and systemic corruption[5], rent-seeking, informal patronage and monopoly, weak civil society (most of the NGOs are heavily donor fund dependent and often have to adjust their missions according to the agendas of the donors) (UNDP/HDRP 2010), lack of viable opposition, state controlled (formally and informally) mass media, elections marred with gross violations (Freedom House 2010-2016), lack of information and awareness of ordinary citizens about their rights and freedoms on one hand, and the responsibilities of the government and those of various level public institutions on the other hand, are among the problems that impede the progress in the country. The resulting distrust towards the government, widespread apathy and withdrawal of the people from the political and civil lives, have only further aggravated the situation.

Against this backdrop, promotion of civic participation as a medium for achievement of more effective and sustainable outcomes in the areas of democratization and development can be seen as a critical endeavour, which, as this dissertation argues, has a potential to provide redress to many of the aforementioned issues.

While not claiming to be the solution to all the democratization and development related problems, it is argued that citizen participation can have a strong impact and play a critical role in informing government policies and decision-making on the issues affecting people's lives, and can considerably contribute to better governance and accountability on the whole, helping to ensure the application of democratic principles in practice. Civic engagement and cooperation with local governments on community issues and priorities can also foster local development through achievement of more effective and sustainable solutions (UNDP 2012), and creation of new business opportunities by and for the locals - small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), public private partnerships (PPPs), cooperatives, start-ups and other initiatives, thereby improving the overall economic prospects of the communities.

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[5] Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for Armenia was 2.9 in 2005 (1-10 scale where 10= 'clean' from corruption, 1 = 'absolutely' corrupted), www.transparency.am

Recognizing the importance of civic participation for any democracy, especially one that strives to reform simultaneously its political and economic sectors, the international community has introduced and implemented numerous projects aimed at promotion of civic engagement, strengthening democracy and rule of law in Armenia, as well as fostering bottom-up development and empowerment of communities to take a more proactive stance and get more actively involved in their own development.

USAID, UNDP, World Bank and GIZ are among the major donors that have been promoting civic engagement efforts in Armenia (as well as in a number of other emerging democracies) from the onset of its independence in 1991.

However, very little independent research has been carried out up to date to evaluate the impact of those and other efforts on the ground, and to examine and assess the actual civic health, civic capacity and habits of the population, the level of civic engagement and the potential of that engagement to influence the course of policy and reforms in Armenia.

While addressing that issue, this dissertation, additionally, tends to shed light on the barriers to civic participation in Armenia and identify the opportunities and potential for a broader and more meaningful (higher impact) citizen involvement in decision-making and policy formation processes. Towards that end, the research also examines the determinants of civic participation, and particularly the relationship of civic participation with social capital, civic education and ICT use in Armenia.

The study aims to capture the trends in the use of Internet and the increasing, simultaneously with 'internetization' or ICT diffusion in the country, public awareness on rights, access to information and online civic activism, and assess whether ICT can serve as an additional platform and a tool for civic engagement in Armenia.

Given the growing importance of the concept of civic participation and its role for democratization and, ultimately, for economic development outcomes in a country that is undergoing a comprehensive transition, the research problem is extremely relevant and topical for informing further policy directions and development practice.

## *Primary Research Focus and Questions*

The primary research focuses on the following main areas and questions:

### *1.Civic Participation and Civic Health in Armenia*

- What are the forms, patterns and trends of civic participation in Armenia?
- Who participates and who does not? Why?
- What are the obstacles to civic participation?
- What are the opportunities for civic participation?
- Civic Health in Armenia: Civic Participation indicators, Civic Participation Score and Index

### *2. Determinants of Civic Participation and Relationship of Civic Engagement with Social Capital, Civic Education and Internet and Communication Technology (ICT)*

- What are the determinants of civic participation – individual and contextually conditioned factors that foster or impede civic participation?

It is suggested that Social Capital, Civic Education and Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT) are important determinants of civic participation, affecting the patterns, forms and magnitude of civic activism in the country. Therefore, the research examines more closely the relationship of the above-mentioned factors with civic participation in Armenia. Towards that end, the research looks at the following issues:

2.1. Social Capital:
- Are there any stocks of social capital in the Armenian communities? What are the types of available social capital (if any) and what is the relationship of social capital and civic engagement? Which type of social capital is particularly conductive to civic participation and collective action?

2.2. Civic Education:
- What is the situation with Civic Education in Armenia? Is the current level of civic education adequate for equipping people with knowledge on their duties and rights as citizens?

2.3. Internet and Communication Technology (ICT):

- What is the current practice of ICT use for civic activism in Armenia? What is the situation with e-democracy and e-governance (online participation in decision-making, online representation of institutions, state agencies, the content and interactive capacities of their websites, etc.)? What are the opportunities for online civic activism? Can ICT serve as an additional and viable platform for civic participation in Armenia? Whether and how can increased e-participation (civic engagement via ICT) impact the progress with development and democratization in Armenia?

3. ***Impact of Civic Participation on Democratization and Development in Armenia; Obstacles and Opportunities***

- Does the current level of civic participation have an impact on democratization and development processes in Armenia? If yes, how? What is the impact of civic participation on democratization targets – citizens' input in decision-making and policy formation processes, protection of citizens' civic, political and other rights and freedoms; cooperation with local government (LG), transparency and accountability of public institutions, etc. What is the impact of civic participation on economic development in Armenia – local development opportunities, SMEs, PPPs, cooperatives, start-ups, etc.?

- What impedes and what could increase the impact of civic participation on democratization and development outcomes in Armenia?

## *Research Background*

Extensive primary research has been carried out in Armenia for the purposes of this dissertation. The primary research was made possible with the generous support of the Doctoral School in Local Development and Global Dynamics of the University of Trento in Italy.

During the field research that lasted for five months in total, I cooperated with the Vanadzor Branch of the European Regional Educational Academy (EREA) in Armenia, which became a hub for my research work, community trips, interviews, surveys, networking and other research related activity in Armenia. Cooperation with the staff and the students at the EREA, their collaborative attitude and readiness to answer my numerous questions and queries, informal discussions held with them on a wide range of subjects covering civic activism, democracy, reforms, laws, unemployment, poverty, trust/distrust to the government in Armenia, etc., helped me to re-immerse into the reality of the present day Armenia and re-acquaint myself with the

current situation and prevalent moods in the country, after almost 3 years of being away from it, and helped me gain a better understanding of the general context and the growing tendencies. Additionally, frequent discussions, consultations and interviews with my former colleagues and contacts who had been involved in civil society and democracy building efforts with international or local organizations in Armenia for many years, provided valuable insights and information on the subjects of interest to this study. All these collaborations significantly informed and facilitated the research.

Another enriching and valuable for this dissertation experience has been the month spent at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia, where I have had an opportunity to meet in an academic setting with many distinguished scholars and scientists, learn from them and improve my knowledge of a variety of subjects, including Social and Economic Development, Organizations and Governance, Social Capital and Social Network Analysis.

The formative courses that I took during the first year of my studies at the Doctoral School of Local Development and Global Dynamics at the University of Trento increased my understanding of a number of inter-disciplinary subjects, provided me with a strong theoretical background in economics, sociology, development studies and political science, as well as enriched my knowledge of advanced social research methods and, overall, provided a strong foundation for this research.

## *Research Methodology*

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques has been used to collect data for the study.

Namely, the following tools have been used:

- *Internet research* on Civil Society Sector in Armenia and *Informal Interviews* with CSO representatives – to study the framework for action of civil society organizations (CSOs) and obtain information on the current situation, existing issues and challenges.

- *Internet research* on donor funded projects directed to strengthening civil society and promoting civic activism, participatory governance and democracy in Armenia;

- *Key informant interviews and media reports study* to collect comprehensive information on the major Civic Activism Campaigns and Civic Initiatives carried out in Armenia over

the past five years, as well as their outcomes and impact. The Civic Initiatives and Campaigns that involved at least a few thousand participants and received wide media coverage were classified as *major* for the purposes of this research.

- *'Civic Health' Questionnaire[6] for measuring civic participation* has been developed and administered in a randomly selected University in the capital (Yerevan) and a randomly selected University in the other 2 larger cities of Armenia (Gyumri, Vanadzor) in 2013. For identification of civic participation trends, the same survey has been administered in the same University in the capital city of Yerevan a year later - in 2014. (A copy of Civic Health Questionnaire, translated into English, is presented in Annex 4.)

- *Civic Education Quality Assessment:* Research, encompassing review of the textbook, class observation and interviews with civic education teachers and students, has been carried out to assess civic education practice in Armenia (Civic Education Quality Assessment Guide is presented in Annex 2).

- *Internet research of available 'e-platforms' for civic participation, online public institutions* - the government, ministries, agencies; study of their website content and interactive tools to assess the extent to which citizens can engage and enter into dialogue, access information and resolve their issues online, etc.;

- *Questionnaire on Internet Use Patterns* has been administered at 3 randomly selected Universities (in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor) to identify the patterns and preferences in Internet use by students, and assess whether and to what extent Internet serves or has a potential to serve as a platform for civic engagement in Armenia. (A copy of the Questionnaire, translated into English, is presented in Annex 3).

- *Community Profile Mapping, Focus Group Meetings, Key Informant Interviews and Observation* have been used in 10 communities (rural or small urban) across Armenia. Random selection has been applied to select 1 community from each of the 10 regions of Armenia in order to ensure adequate geographical coverage[7]. (General data has been gathered on the community, public institutions, CSOs (special attention has been paid to

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[6] A tool used by National Congress on Citizenship (NCOS) to measure civic participation in America will be adapted and used for research

[7] The capital Yerevan ,which has a status of a Marz comprised of 12 communities, has been excluded from this part of the research as its situation differs drastically from the rest of the Marzes with their communities in the country.

both officially registered (NGOs) and non-registered community-based groups/organizations (CBOs), associations, grassroots and other non-state actors, private sector organizations, etc., participation of community in decision-making (attendance to the Community Council meetings, initiatives, access to information on community budget, the development programme, etc.).

Detailed information has been collected regarding forms and patterns of civic participation in those communities, cooperation of the community with the state and non-state actors in addressing the community issues, citizens' participation in decision-making, social capital and its relation to civic participation, the impact of the CSOs activities on the local development and democratization processes, constraints and opportunities, etc. (A Guide for Community Profile Mapping, observation, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Meetings is presented in Annex1.)

▪ *Social Capital Study* – research based on the most frequently used proxies for measuring social capital - (1) group membership, (2) trust and solidarity, (3) collective action, (4) information and communication, (5) inclusion and empowerment, (6) agency capacity of local leaders, has been conducted in the selected 10 case study communities to obtain information regarding the stocks and types of social capital available there and make inferences regarding the relationship of social capital and civic participation (Guide to social capital study is presented in Annex 1).

Other techniques such as observation, informal discussions and triangulation have been used to gain a deeper insight into the issues of interest to the research and to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the collected primary data.

To theoretically frame and inform the research, the paper provides an overview of the key, and in particular, the recent literature, as well as documents and reports of the local agencies and the leading organizations and think tanks working in the field of democracy and development (e.g. United Nations, World Bank, Freedom House, Transparency International, etc.), pertinent to the issues of relevance to this study. To provide a more comprehensive background for analysis of the situation and the trends in post-soviet Armenia, the research has also employed a comparative approach, juxtaposing the available data and information on civic participation in established democracies, as well as in post-communist European states and other post-soviet transitioning countries.

## *Contribution for Science and Practice*

The work complements the existing body of knowledge and the on-going research on civic participation, its indicators, determinants, manifestations, trends, and its potential in emerging democracies, and provides an assessment of the impact of civic engagement on democracy and local development in a post-soviet country setting. Additionally, the research contributes to the discourse on availability of social capital in post-soviet contexts and its potential to contribute to economic development and generation of civic activism towards the end of promoting democracy building efforts and rule of law in the young democracies.

The empirical quest of this work also spreads to another topical for the 21st century issue - the growing significance of Internet and communication technologies and their impact on every aspect of life, and provides insights on internet use habits and potential of ICT to serve as an additional platform and tool for civic activism in an emerging democracy context.

The proposed Civic Participation Score and Index are innovative tools that allow measuring civic participation within and across countries, as well as monitoring the progress - overall and by individual indicator categories, for a more thorough analysis and development of better targeted and tailored solutions for increasing civic capacity and civic engagement of the population.

The findings of this study feed into and enrich the existing body of empirical research on civic engagement, its determinants and role in democracy and local development building efforts, provide policy implications and further inform democratization and development practice in post-soviet country settings.

## *Limitations and Further Research Needs*

Due to limited resources (time, human resources, funds), the research is confined to only one country – Armenia, where I have already had experience of work on the ground and in-depth knowledge of the policies, reforms, as well as the communities, civil society networks and international organizations, all of which have greatly facilitated the data collection process and allowed for a more informed analysis of the issues pertinent to this study.

The research might have benefited from inclusion of a bigger number of rural and urban communities in the sample and a more wide-scale study of civic participation and social capital

across the Armenian communities. Nevertheless, the data received from the current sample allow for accurate results and conclusions regarding the issues at hand.

Further research in the neighbouring post-soviet countries in the South Caucasus - Georgia and Azerbaijan, and the study of transition trajectories and civic participation patterns, practices and trends there would be of benefit for comparison and a more comprehensive analysis of civic engagement, democratization and development practice with its peculiarities in the region.

The introduced tool for measuring civic participation could be applied on a larger scale in the following year(s) to allow computation of a Civic Participation Index and subsequent comparison of the results with the view of providing a more complete picture of the changes and trends in civic participation within and among cities and/or countries.

## *Summary*

The research context and background, as well as a detailed account of the research needs, its main focus, objectives and methodology, have been presented in the Introduction, which has also outlined the contribution of the research, its advantages, limitations and further study needs.

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical framework for the research, by exploring and analysing the available studies and information – the state of the art, on the concepts of democracy, civil society and development, and their relation and role for civic participation, with a specific focus on the peculiarities of those concepts in the transitioning post-soviet countries.

Chapter 2 presents in detail the concept of civic participation and what it entails, identifies its key determinants and discusses the indicators that have been used so far by various organizations for measuring civic participation.

A 'Civic Health' assessment tool, developed and used across the US by a think-tank NCOC (National Conference on Citizenship) is further introduced and analysed in terms of its relevance for usage in the post-soviet context of Armenia.

In the discussion of the determinants of civic participation, this chapter examines closely the concepts of social capital, civic education and ICT, and their relation and role for civic participation.

Chapter 3 presents the transition trajectory and practice in Armenia, examining the specifics of democracy building and development processes in the country and the role and magnitude of

civic participation in those efforts. The chapter provides the background and maps the context for analysis of civic participation, its challenges and opportunities in the post-soviet country setting.

Empirical findings on civic participation across Armenian communities, its forms, patterns, participants, incentives, obstacles, opportunities and impact are provided in Chapter 4. The information and data gathered from the case study communities provide local insights into the practice, forms, magnitude and impact of civic participation on democracy and development outcomes across Armenia. To complement and further expand the knowledge on civic participation in Armenia, the chapter also outlines the major civic initiatives and campaigns, implemented in the country over the course of the recent five years, and analyses their outcomes and impact, assessing the potential of the latter to influence the political, economic and other processes in the country and, ultimately, have an impact on democratization and development.

Chapter 5 presents and discusses the key determinants of civic participation, as identified during the primary research in the communities and interviews with civil society actors and activists. A close attention is paid to such key determinants as social capital, civic education and ICT use practice in Armenia and the relationship of those determinants with civic participation.

Chapter 6 presents the adapted for the local context 'Civic Health' tool and introduces a scale for measuring Civic Participation, based on a defined set of indicator categories and separate indicators, operationalized with the view of producing a Civic Participation Score (CP Score) - total and per indicator category, that would allow measuring and comparing civic participation across cities and countries, as well as proposes a Civic Participation Index (CP Index) for further analysis of civic health and civic participation with its trends, specifics and needs in any given context over a certain period of time.

Chapter 6 subsequently presents the results of the application of 'Civic Heath' tool in 3 larger cities of Armenia – Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor, and provides detailed findings on civic participation status and trends in those cities by comparing the CP Scores for each city and overall, across all the indicator categories, as well as computing a CP Index, based on the difference in the CP Score for Yerevan in the consecutively conducted surveys of 2013 and 2014.

Chapter 7 concludes the research, summarizing the key points of the study and its results, with a specific focus on the primary research findings that complement and further enhance the knowledge on civic participation, its role, specifics and needs in post-soviet country settings.

# CHAPTER 1. DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY: MAPPING THE CONTEXT FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

## *1. 1. Introduction*

Over the recent decades, there has been a growing impetus for more effective democratization and development policies, as a large number of countries from Eastern Europe to Eurasia embarked on the path of dual transition at the end of the 20th century, restructuring and reforming their political and economic systems and experimenting with several approaches and policies, often copying or adapting the 'best practices' of the developed democratic states.

The outcome of those efforts, however, has been mixed. Some countries made significant progress in the areas of democracy and development (e.g. Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, etc. (Freedom House 2014, UNDP 2014)), while in others - democratic transformation stalled or even reversed (e.g. Russia, Azerbaijan, etc. (Freedom House 2014)) and economy stagnated. Implementation of democratic principles, achievement of economic growth, fight against poverty and unemployment still remain an unfinished agenda in a number of those 'developing' or 'transitional' countries.

Many observers in political science and development studies have attempted to provide the answer to the question of development disparities and explain why certain countries or even certain communities succeed in what the neighbouring countries or communities fail to achieve. Different political trajectories, capacity of the states (Carothers 2002), past legacies, path dependency, social capital (Putnam 1993) policies and institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012) and other factors have been named in an attempt to explain the difference in democratization and development outcomes in the transitional states and beyond.

The term 'transitional' itself and its applicability to the new democracies has been questioned and critiqued by certain authors (e.g. Carothers 2002), who suggest that the reality in those countries is more complex and messy, and the existing regimes have rather acquired some stable form, often referred to as 'hybrid', 'semi-democracy' or 'elected democracy' (ibid., Diamond 2002, Morlino 2008).

Exporting democracy to the formerly totalitarian and autocratic states proved to be a rather challenging task, which is not surprising, given the diverse historical, cultural, political and economic backgrounds of those countries.

Several democratization theories and models have emerged, adding to or challenging one another, in an attempt to analyse and explain the complex process of transformation of the former authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes to a more democratic one.

It has been widely recognized that the 'health' of democracy is contingent on the strength and quality of the civil society. 'The watchful eye of the people' – the role of the public in overseeing the elected representatives, has been traditionally considered as a key measure against corruption and misuse of the power by the government.

While civil society in the developed and consolidated democracies is often characterized as *strong* and *vibrant*, civil society in the emerging or 'transition' democracies, on contrary, is generally described as *weak* and *donor-dependent* (Henderson 2002; Ishkanian 2006, etc.), and facing an urgent need to be revitalized in order to assume its rightful role in counterbalancing the state and exerting checks on the power.

During the last quarter of a century, there has been a considerable evolution in the development thinking, accompanied by an increased understanding of the nature of the challenges posed to it. New development policies and poverty reduction frameworks have emerged and developed since the 2nd half of the 20th century, alongside with the shifts in thinking on poverty, influenced, among others, by the work of Amartya Sen on entitlements and capabilities (1981, 1997, 1999), rights-based approach to development (Häusermann 1998, UDNP 2000), and the World Bank's 'three-pronged approach' to poverty reduction through opportunity, security and empowerment (WDR[8] 2000/2001). The poverty reduction framework, undergoing significant changes, has moved from its narrow, materialistic perception, to recognizing the broader and more complex nature of poverty, which also became reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There also has been an increased awareness of the political dimension of development (Deneulin 2002, UNDP 2002). Empowerment and participation of the poor in the design and implementation of policies became to be seen as a key to effective anti-poverty efforts (Chambers 1997, Narayan et

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[8] World Development Report

al 2000, WDR 2000/2001), and there is an increasingly growing consensus on the importance of citizen participation for strengthening democracy, promotion of good governance and improvement of the processes and mechanisms that can be used to achieve development goals (UNDP 2002). Democracy and good governance, entailing such attributes as transparency, accountability, efficiency, participation, rule of law, control of corruption, political stability, absence of violence and realization of human rights, came to be recognized as important factors contributing to both democracy building and economic development (UNDP 2002, etc.).

Embedding participation and engagement of citizens in the processes of development, alongside with localization of the development plans, strengthening institutions, capacities and partnership with civil society for creation of an inclusive, enabling environment and increased accountability mechanisms, lie at the heart of the post-2015 development agenda (UN 2014).

There is a growing body of research that suggests that civic participation or civic engagement is a key factor not only for promotion of democratic values and practices in a country, but also for improvement of the economic performance. For instance, research carried out by Raiser (2008) shows a positive correlation between civic engagement and economic growth in the transition countries over a 10-year period of time (1989-1998). It is inferred that low level of civic participation and weak civil society in the new democratic states have been impediments for transition and the causes of poor economic performance (ibid.). It is also suggested that the cooperation of civil society organizations and the local government can directly contribute to the local or regional economic development by fostering development of private businesses, small and medium sized enterprises and cooperatives in the given locality (Snavely and Desai 2001).

While civic participation can be viewed as a key ingredient in the recipe for democratization and development, it is also important to keep in mind that civic participation is embedded in a certain context where these processes are taking place. The opportunities for 'practicing' democracy or civic engagement, as well as the quality and magnitude of the latter, are dependent on and influenced by the historical and cultural contexts, existing institutions and the progress with democracy and civil society building, as well as the economic development in a given setting. All these factors inevitably affect and condition the opportunities for civic participation and the manifestations and potential of the latter.

This chapter explores the concepts of democracy, development, civil society and their connection

with civic participation, and provides a general framework for the study and analysis of civic participation and its trends in a transitional country setting.

## *1.2. Democracy*

As it is widely known, the word 'Democracy' means 'rule by people' in Ancient Greek, and although there is no single, unanimously agreed upon and accepted definition of the term, it is generally characterized as a system of governance entailing the following key elements:

- Regular elections: people elect their representatives in free and fair elections;
- Active participation of citizens in the public life;
- Protection of human rights for all citizens;
- Rule of law, i.e. law applies equally to all the citizens (Diamond 2004).

Democracy implies 'self–government of equals' and serves to restrict and impose control and checks over the unlimited power (Keane 2009).

Different authors and observers have contributed to the elaboration and exploration of the concept of democracy over the last two centuries. The task of defining 'democracy' has been approached from different angles, depending on the historical period and the purposes of definition.

Normative definitions of democracy usually stress the legitimizing power of people or citizens –*a government of the people, by the people, for the people.*

Charles Tilly (2007), based on the analysis of the definitions of the term, provided by a number of contributors, classified them into four types: *constitutional, substantive, procedural, and process-oriented definitions*. As further elaborated by Tilly, *constitutional* approach is mainly used for differentiating the regimes and is reflected in the legal provisions of the states. *Substantive* approaches deal with the politics and the basic values, rights and conditions of life the given regime stipulates: e.g. whether the regime promotes welfare, security, individual freedom, etc. *Procedural* definitions focus on a range of government practices to decide whether the regime can be qualified as democratic or no. This is the approach used, for instance, by the US-based think tank Freedom House, where they look for a number of procedural elements in assigning democracy scores and freedom levels to countries. *Process-oriented* definitions determine a minimum set of processes that must be in continuous progress in order for the setting to be qualified as democratic.

For a minimalistic definition of democracy, most authors refer to Josef Schumpeter's explanation of the doctrine:

> *"the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.* (Schumpeter 2003:269)

Schumpeter's definition, however, is considered mainly procedural and lacking the mention of other important aspects that the concept of democracy entails, such as, for instance, government's accountability to people, responsiveness to people's needs and preferences, and availability of mechanisms by which people can have their say in the policy formation process (e.g. Diamond 1997, Kurki 2010, etc.).

Political scientist Robert Dahl, building on the procedural concept, developed the theory of 'polyarchal[9] democracy' (1971) – which, basically, implies that the power is vested in multiple people. He established certain core elements for polyarchies – the term he used in reference to the modern Western democracies. Dahl's pluralistic model includes such important elements of democracy as competitiveness and participation.

Six institutions need to be present in a regime in order for it to be called 'polyarchal':

- Elected officials;
- Free, fair and frequent elections,
- Freedom of expression;
- Alternative sources of information,
- Freedom of association; and
- Universal adult suffrage (inclusive citizenship) (Dahl 1998:85; 2005:188-189).

Dahl's theory introduced a certain degree of clarity to the previously rather vague concept, and, as suggested by a number of scholars, can serve as a checklist for determining whether or not a country can be considered a democracy (e.g. Tilly 2007). Some observers maintain that Dahl's definition of democracy entails the basic civil liberties that can enable citizens to participate in an informed manner (e.g. Menocal 2007).

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[9] Polyarchy – Greek: *poly* "many", *arkhe* "rule" (www.dictionary.com)

Thus, to be qualified as a democracy, a political system has to meet the following minimum requirements: 1) universal adult suffrage, 2) recurring free competitive and fair elections, 3) more than one political party, and 4) different and alternative sources of information (e.g. Dahl 1971, Morlino 1998, 2008, etc.).

In a more simplified version, suggested by Tilly, "a regime is democratic to the degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected and mutually binding consultation" (2007:13-14).

In more substantive definitions of the term, much attention is attached to the role of accountability. Democracy observers usually distinguish three levels of accountability: *vertical* – which enables citizens to hold their government accountable, *horizontal* - which refers to the mechanism of accountability that exists within different structures of government, and *societal* accountability- which refers to the so called 'watchdog' functions of civil society organizations.

While democracy is an old concept that is most commonly believed to be invented in Athens, in the $5^{th}$ century BC[10], with the purpose of restricting tyranny, the recent decades witnessed a renewed attention and interest towards the concept, especially with the spread of the so-called 'third wave' of democracy (Huntington 1991), the fall of the soviet regime and the start of democracy building efforts in the newly independent states.

Gaining a momentum, democracy became to be seen as 'the only game in town', even to the extent that it was suggested to mark the 'End of History" (Fukuyama 1989, 1993), or the end of the ideological evolution, implying the absolute victory of liberal democracy over other forms of government in the world - a rather overenthusiastic prognosis, as the unfolding history proved.

After the Cold War, many states and international organizations, such as the USA, European Union, UN and others, launched democracy promotion initiatives to support democratization in the former autocracies and dictatorships. In general, the democracy promotion assistance was initially well-accepted in the recipient countries, both at the government and CSO levels, resulting in hundreds of projects promoting democratization, rule of law and good governance in the newly established democratic states.

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[10] Before Christ

However, during the recent years, the initial hype and obsession with the idea of democracy started to fade somewhat, giving way to scepticism and backlash against it in many countries around the world, not least as a result of the overuse and abuse of 'democracy promotion' rhetoric, and interventionist politics of the United States, in particular, President George W. Bush's administration, that infamously attempted to 'transfer democracy' to Iraq at a gunpoint.

The backlash against democracy has been also fuelled by suspicions that the democracy promotion agencies, funding projects in the newly democratic states, have been behind the 'colour revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, and the elite groups in power in some of the authoritarian countries started to express resistance to democratization assistance and refuse to work with international NGOs and democracy promotion groups (Carothers 2006). A noteworthy case of such resistance is Russia, where president Putin has recently signed a bill requiring all the NGOs to report in advance all their projects and sources of funding, and empowered authorities to shut down any 'undesirable NGOs', that are deemed to pose any risk to the political situation in the country, on the grounds of 'national security' (BBC 2015, WSJ 2015). Similar trends are noticeable also in the neighbouring former soviet countries, such as Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where the authorities attempt to control any interaction of donor organizations with the local political parties, fearing 'Western meddling' in their local affairs and destabilization of the political situation (Carothers 2006).

These reversals and backslides, however, can be considered normal - as Samuel Huntington (1997-2008) noted in regards to 'Waves of democratization', democracies are prone to a reverse tide which can take them to some other form of non-democratic rule.

While the concept of democracy has lost some of its popularity over the recent years, it still continues to be very much appealing for the people around the world, most notably, for the promise of freedom and equality that it entails.
The governing elites in many authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states continue at least paying the lip service to democracy and democratic principles with the view of increasing their popularity and legitimacy of their rule.

John Keane, in his book "Life and Death of Democracy" (2009) traces the history of democracy and shows how the meaning of the concept changes in different periods of time throughout the history, as do the democratic values and institutions. Keane differentiates between three epochs of

democracy development – (1) assembly democracy, when democracy has been geographically bound and public assembly based; representative democracy (from 1776 onwards) when citizens elected representatives to express their will and choices 'through' them, and what he calls 'monitory democracy'- the current phase of democracy as we know it today, which is characterised by the existence of numerous 'power-monitoring' and 'power-controlling' devices and institutions known as 'watch-dogs', 'barking dogs' and 'guide-dogs' - various commissions, assemblies, tribunals, courts, citizen juries, think-tanks, participatory budgeting, blogging and other means of monitoring and controlling the power (ibid.).

Monitory democracy requires a presence of a strong civil society, which will be able to follow closely the process of governance, exert control and checks on the power, detect and highlight the deficiencies of the system and follow up on their improvement.

While democracy monitoring devices and institutions can be divided into internal (e.g. local courts, CSOs, citizen unions and assemblies, 'civic communities', etc.) and external (think-tanks, international and supranational organizations, assemblies, courts, reports, etc.) it is argued that for democracy to work in a given country, it is essential to have the *local* monitoring devices and institutions in place and functioning properly, as without the internal monitoring and pressure by the active citizenry and power-controlling means and institutions, the external monitoring devices and institutions will not be able to have as much influence and as many leverages as to significantly affect the situation 'on the ground' in the countries where certain elements of democracy might be missing.

Many observers note that one of the main reasons for the poor performance of the new democracies and the authoritarian backlash is the absence of engaged citizenry or the 'civic community', as well as absence of independent and properly functioning democratic institutions in those countries (e.g. Putnam 1993, 2000; Diamond 2008, etc.).

While some new democracies claim to work hard to acquire the form of a democratic regime and establish democratic institutions, they are still unable to ensure the democratic substance and realization of the underlying principles of democracy in practice. Creating a façade of democracy in order to legitimize the regime, mostly under the external and internal pressures, has been characterized as 'pseudo-democracy' by Diamond (2002). He notes that in the pseudo-democratic countries *"there are regular, multiparty elections and other formal institutions of democracy like*

*a national assembly, court system and constitution, and so on, but the people are not able to vote their leaders out of power because the system is in effect, rigged…"* (Diamond 2008:23).

Diamond classifies Armenia, alongside with Singapore, Iran, Venezuela, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria and some others, to the countries "that occupy an ambiguous space between democracy and overt authoritarianism". He points to the fact that these countries hold elections and have some civil society, nevertheless, the individual and associational freedoms are restricted and the elections are usually rigged and fraudulent. These countries have also been often labelled as 'elective authoritarian regimes" (2008:26), 'hybrid regimes' or 'managed democracies' (ibid., Paczynska 2005).

Following the initial over-enthusiasm and optimistic prognosis regarding the victory of democracy in the world in the late 1980-es, as expressed most notably by Francis Fukuyama's famous 'End of history' thesis (1989), where he argues that all the main opposition to the liberal democracy in the face of imperialism, nationalism, fascism, communism and military dictatorships had fallen and it was now the era of the triumph of democracy, as there is no other alternative to it, time and the recent history showed again that democracy building is a rather difficult and long process, with lots of obstacles, backlashes and reversals. As John Keane (2009) rightfully observes "Democracy is always on the move. It is not a finished performance…" (pg. 867) and even the distinction between the 'consolidated', 'transitional' and 'failed' democracies can be questioned, as no democracy is ever 'good enough' or free from the need to be refurbished and improved (ibid.).

The term 'transitional democracy', that became popular at the end of the 20th century and has been used ever since in reference to the newly established democracies, which are in the process of transforming their political systems, has been a subject of debates.

Carothers (2002) argues that the 'transition paradigm' has outlived the period of its relevance, and that the reality in the so-called 'transitional' countries is more complex and does not always conform to the basic underlying assumptions of the 'transition paradigm'. He studies the efficacy and applicability of the transition paradigm by analysing the political trajectories of the transition democracies and comparing them against each of the five core assumptions on which the transition paradigm is based.

The first assumption of the paradigm is that any country 'moving away from authoritarianism is moving in the direction of democracy'. Carothers points out that this assumption can be

misleading, as many of the transition democracies have adopted some stable form in between authoritarianism and democracy, and might not necessarily be moving toward democracy (2002). The second assumption is that democratization takes place in a specific sequence of stages, namely: democratic opening, breakthrough, transition and consolidation. Democracy activists, however, in line with the available evidence, suggest that the countries can also go backwards or stagnate on this path, as well as go further towards consolidation (ibid.). The third assumption is the overarching role and importance of elections for a democracy. Carothers notes that while it is generally admitted that elections do not automatically mean democracy, they are, nevertheless, believed to broaden political participation and increase state accountability to citizens. The fourth assumption is that the existing factors in the transition countries – the level of economic development, political history, institutional legacies, etc., do not have any effect on the outcome of democracy. This is the so called 'no precondition' for democracy postulate, which came to overturn the 'democracy is not for everyone' viewpoint. Nonetheless, this assumption too can be questioned and critiqued, as we witness different experiences with democracy in the countries with different institutional legacies, history, culture and level of economic development.

The fifth assumption of the paradigm is that democracy transition during the 'third wave' was taking place in well-functioning states, which already had all the prerequisites for turning into democracy. This assumption is also disputable, as many of the transitioning countries are believed to have had virtually non-functional states in the aftermath of the fall of the soviet regime and had to basically re-build their political systems from scratch (Carothers 2002, Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, etc.).

Despite the mentioned issues and controversies surrounding the term 'transitional', it is still used loosely in this thesis (along with a variety of other works by many scholars and observers) in reference to Armenia and other countries that are in the process of transitioning from some form of dictatorship to democracy.

Based on the criteria of the *right to opposition* and the *level of inclusion and participation,* Dahl (1971) distinguishes among the following political regimes:

- *closed hegemonies*, where citizens have no opposition rights;
- *competitive oligarchies*, where only a specific group of citizens have the right to opposition;

- *inclusive hegemonies,* where all people are granted some low level of participation, and
- *polyarchies,* where opposition rights are granted equally to all the citizens.

A path to democratization or *liberalization,* in Dahl's analysis, lies through the gradual transformation of the regime, through increased inclusiveness and opportunities for public contestation, from a *closed hegemony*, to *competitive oligarchy*, then to *inclusive hegemony*, and, finally, to a *polyarchy*. According to Dahl, this gradual transformation and socialization of new groups to the 'rules of the game' results in healthier and more stable polyarchies, compared to liberalization achieved through skipping any of the transformational stage and arriving at the destination 'polyarchy' using a short-cut, which is fraught with a greater risk for the achieved democracy to backslide or reverse.

In democratic theory, scholars differentiate among various types or models of democracy, such as, for instance, *liberal democracy, social democracy, participatory democracy*, *deliberative democracy*, *cosmopolitan democracy*, or *radical democracy*, and study their main elements and different emphases in power relations. However, it is important to note that within the context of democratization, mainly the *liberal* model of democracy is being implied.

*Liberal democracy* is commonly defined as "*a political system where representative democracy operates under the principles of liberalism*", hence, the accent here is placed on the rights and freedoms of an individual (right to speak, assemble, demonstrate, lobby, publish, etc.), and the elements of plurality, rule of law and equality are stressed (Diamond 1997).

In her recent book "Can Democracy Be Saved?" (2013) Donatella della Porta discusses different models of democracy and suggests that in the process of evolution of the existing democracies the liberal model has been initially challenged, however, it was gradually bridged with other conceptions of democracy, such as participatory and deliberative ones. Echoing Dalton (2004, 2008), Rosanvallon (2008) and other scholars concerned with the workings of democracy and the significant decline in the level of citizen trust toward political parties in the consolidated democracies, della Porta draws attention to the importance of citizen participation in a democracy, as a mere existence of elections cannot be considered as a sufficient condition for democracy. Direct participation, involvement or intervention of citizens in the decision-making process on the issues affecting their lives lies in the basis of the *participatory model of democracy*. Participatory

democracy is especially considered central for social movements, since it grants the citizens the capacity to intervene in all the decisions that affect their everyday life. "Participation, then, creates a virtuous cycle…" (ibid. 40), as by participating in a civic activity people increase their knowledge, trust, and hence, motivation to participation more.

Alongside *participatory democracy*, the recent decade saw also a renewed interest and increased attention towards the concept of *deliberative democracy*, the central idea of which is decision-making by discussion and participation of free and equal citizens, 'non-elites' and grassroots (e.g. Elster 1998, Crocker 2008, etc.).

> "*Deliberative democracy, broadly defined, is… any one of a family of views according to which the public deliberation of free and equal citizens is the core of legitimate political decision-making and self-government*" (Bohman 1998:401).

Deliberative model of democracy emphasises the process of *transformation of citizens' preferences* during deliberation or contestation of ideas  - it is "a process through which initial preferences are transformed in order to take into account the points of view of the others" (Miller 1993:75 in della Porta 2013).

In the deliberative model of democracy, dialogue, communication, horizontal flows of information, as well as the importance of reaching a consensus on a matter of common interest and achieving legitimation through the process of deliberation of equal citizens are stressed. Acknowledging the virtues of the deliberative process, however, some scholars point out to certain weaknesses of the model, for instance, the circumstance that deliberative theorists rarely specify the decision rules or offer advice on the cases when a consensus has not been reached in the process of deliberation and/or a conflict has arisen as a result of contestation (Miller 1992, Smith 2009, etc.).

While decision-making through deliberation and participation of citizens can be a challenging exercise to be organized on a larger scale (e.g. regional, national), it is suggested, that on a smaller scale or local level, for instance, in small towns or villages, it can be quite a tangible practice, and it can be very empowering for communities to engage in discussion and decision-making on the issues affecting their lives.

Close to this idea is the concept of *collaborative governance*, which implies involvement of both state and non-state actors in decision-making processes (Ansell and Gash 2008). An important

detail here is the stress on a two-way communication between the state and non-state actors, as well as the idea underlying the concept - that it is different from consultation and use of participatory techniques of consulting stakeholders and learning about their priorities: collaborative governance implies cooperation and decision-making on equal terms (ibid.).

The importance of increasing citizen participation and societal monitoring in politics appears to be a consistent theme elaborated upon by many scholars of democratic theory.

Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) argues that democracy needs legitimization and trust, and therefore it needs 'counter-democracy', or counter-powers - control of people over the elected representatives and the government, for which he identifies the following three dimensions or mechanisms – *oversight* or *surveillance*, which comprise such key elements as vigilance, denunciation and evaluation, *prevention or obstruction* – the capacity to reverse or nullify a decision/resolution by means of a political intervention, opposition, resistance or rebellion, and *judgement* ('people as judges') – people's ability to scrutinize, carefully evaluate and pass a judgement regarding an issue or an action. These three mechanisms or 'powers' constitute important measures of control, pressure and constraint over the elected government, in addition to and in-between elections.

Civic vigilance is usually performed by public and various CSOs - press, media, unions, associations and alike, and can take a form of strikes, protests, demonstrations, journalistic investigations, etc. Rosanvallon (2008) stresses the importance of the 'vigilant citizen', alongside with the 'voter citizen'. Central to the theory of 'counter-democracy' is the presence of the *active citizen*, who, contrary to the spread beliefs of people's disenchantment with politics and political apathy, participates and gets involved in various associations, demonstrations, strikes, petitions, thereby becoming a part of the 'counter-power' (ibid.)

In his book "Democratic Innovations", Graham Smith (2009), analyses and evaluates various institutional designs created with the purpose of allowing increased citizen participation in the decision-making. In defining *democratic innovations*, Smith emphasises the *institutionalized* forms of participation and the condition of involvement of the society – the *regular* citizens, as opposed to the citizens who are experts or partisans (ibid.). Smith suggests that introduction of democratic innovations increasing and deepening citizen participation can be one of the strategies for re-engagement of the disillusioned citizens into decision-making. He constructs an analytical framework comprised of 'six democratic goods' – *inclusiveness, popular control, considered*

*judgement, transparency, efficiency* (consideration of the costs participation can require from citizens and authorities) *and transferability* (whether design can be operational in other political contexts), against which he assesses four categories of innovations and provides a rich account of their advantages, strengths and weaknesses. Among the democratic innovations, Smith examines closely 1) the idea of popular assemblies – on the case of participatory budgeting practiced in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2) mini-publics – forums made up by randomly selected citizens, 3) direct legislation - legislative and popular referenda, and 4) recent developments in e-democracy – online forums, internet discussions, and ICT enabled polling. Smith provides a thorough account of these innovations and their potential to engage in decision-making more citizens, including those belonging to the traditionally marginalized social groups.

As no design is perfect and each has its strengths and weaknesses, he emphasises the idea of *institutional complementarities* of the innovations with the view of reinforcing their strengths and diminishing weaknesses, for which he suggests sequencing and combining innovations (Smith 2009:188).

In scholarly literature, the new post-communist states have been often characterized as 'weak' and affected by 'crisis of state capacity'. An important perspective, in connection with this, is offered by Ganev (2001, 2005). In his analysis of the causes of weakness of the post-communist states, he proposes a matrix called "reversed Tillian perspective", based on transposing Charles Tilly's analysis of state formation in Western Europe.

Tilly's inquiry evolves around the dominant elite project- war making, and the measures taken by the elite to extract what is necessary for their purposes from those they ruled – the masses, by creating institutions that would help them to organize the 'extraction' and, at the same time, protect the masses from excessive exploitation and gain their support. These measures are believed to have contributed to state building and creation of an effective structure of governance in Europe. Whereas, as Ganev (2005) argues, the elites, in the post-communist societies, were preying on the wealth accumulated by the *state* and aimed to 'extract' from the state.

Ganev (2001) draws attention to the importance of the historical context in the newly democratic states, where after the fall of the communism all the main assets – natural resources, means of production and finances belonged to the state agencies, and correspondingly, "the economic structures were entwined with administrative agencies" (p. 19), while there was largely no social domain – no civil society organizations, with the exception of some trade unions.

Ganev argues that the interest of the 'predatory elites' lay not in building strong state structures and institutional infrastructure, but in diminishing and undermining what was possible from inside, in order to gain access to the resources they sought after. He notes that a key feature of this 'elite project' is its secrecy and the fact that wider society is excluded from it (Ganev 2005). This explanation of the 'crisis of state' in the post-communist societies seems quite plausible; it is also supported by the reports of the chaotic and 'behind closed doors' privatization that swept across the newly democratic states after the regime change, as well as the rise of oligarchy in many of them.

The *"reversed Tillian perspective"* can indeed explain the disorganized and weak state infrastructure in the post-communist countries, as well as the reluctance of the ruling elites to eliminate certain barriers to democracy and economic growth (e.g. decision-making behind closed doors, unfair practices during elections, lack of accountability and transparency of local and national governments, monopoly, informal patronage and corruption) and ensure mechanisms for law enforcement.

Taking into account the challenges of state building, or rather, state re-building in the new democracies, Ganev (ibid.), therefore, proposes paying more attention to the state building efforts and including statehood building into the number of the 'multiple transitions' taking place in the post-socialist societies.

'The other game in town', according to Ganev, is not authoritarianism, but 'extraction from the state'. Ganev argues that destruction of the institutional infrastructure is "almost a natural development" in the post-communist context, and one of the main challenges facing the society is reversing it (Ganev 2005: 24). This could, indeed, be a challenge for the civil society that is yet to become more viable, capable and pro-active in the post-soviet contexts.

During the recent years, there have been some concerns and criticism concerning the focus of the democracy promotion or democratization efforts solely on the model of liberal democracy. It was suggested that those efforts fell short of acknowledging the contestability of the concept of democracy (Kurki 2010) and lack of sensitivity to the cultural and political context in the given country (Blokker 2008).

While reminding us of the 'essential contestability' of the concept of democracy, Kurki (2010) argues that liberal and 'alternative' models of democracy are not mutually exclusive - they can

co-exist and add to each other at different social levels, and suggests pluralizing and contextualizing the models of democracy being promoted.

An important insight into understanding the varieties of democracy, especially in the new post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), is offered by Paul Blokker (2008), who proposes "multiple democracies" approach to analysing the diverse realities in those countries and stresses the significance of political culture in the given context.

It is therefore suggested that 'fits all' approach and 'blueprint solutions' in democracy promotion should be replaced by more carefully tailored and contextually grounded policies and responses that would be accommodative of the existence of 'multiple transitions' and 'multiple democracies' in the transitioning contexts. The importance of historical legacies, economic development stage, specifics of the political culture and other local realities are critical for the democratization outcome and the type of democracy model achieved in the given locality.

In their insightful book, titled "The origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty: Why Nations Fail", political scientists Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson (2012) argue that the institutions – economic and political, are at the heart of either success of failure of the development efforts of countries and are ultimately accountable for the prosperity of the failure of the latter. Written with historical background and analysis, in this book, Acemoglu and Robinson, distinguish between "extractive" versus "inclusive" institutions and their respective qualities, and argue that the states that were able to create plurality and inclusive economic institutions, based on inclusive political ones, set themselves on the road to prosperity, whereas the states where absolutist regimes and extractive economic institutions prevail, and the elite in power is fearful of anything that challenges their status quo – any creative distraction or innovation that could set off the power relations and loosen their grip on the power, end up blocking economic growth and stalling development. The latter description seems to fit very well with the reality in most of the post-socialist countries, including Armenia.

According to Freedom House's annual report on Freedom in the World 2015, freedom had increased since 1984, together with the number of countries with the ranking *"Free",* however, it plateaued in 2015. The year 2014 was marked by negative trends and worsening situation with democracy, human right and rule of law in many regions of the world (Freedom House 2015). Political turmoil in Ukraine, Russia's annexation of Crimea, crackdown on media and NGOs,

decline of freedom in Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan and democratic setbacks elsewhere prove a case in favour of Freedom House's proposition that the autocratic regimes start to abandon the democracy façade, gradually tightening their grip and trying to close some currently existing narrow avenues for dissent and opposition (ibid. 2015).

It is estimated that among more than 100 countries currently classified as transitional democracies, only around 20 are moving towards democracy and have made some progress, while the majority of the countries entered a 'grey zone' (Carothers 2002). Carothers classifies these governments into two categories - as either 'feckless pluralism' or 'dominant–power' politics. In 'feckless pluralism', people enjoy some level of political freedom, regular elections and shift of power between different elite groups. Democracy in those countries remains weak and superficial, and participation is usually limited to voting. In dominant-power system countries, to which Carothers classifies also Armenia, all the state assets, such as army, police, mass media, etc., are gradually put in the service of the ruling party, and efforts are not spared to put on a façade of fair elections for international observers and the international community. He suggests that the feckless pluralism and dominant-power politics should be treated as alternative directions rather than 'stations' to liberal democracy (ibid.).

Carothers proposes moving beyond the transition paradigm as it is no longer useful and practical for development aid and democracy promotion, and perhaps, formulating new assumptions that would more accurately reflect the current state of political patterns and be more instrumental for democracy promotion in the countries in question.

As another important step in the movement beyond transition paradigm, Carothers (2002) indicates the need for bridging the divide between the aid programs aimed at democracy promotion and those aimed at socio-economic development. He suggests tackling those domains together by a combined effort of both the economic aid providers and democracy promoters, as the development of those domains is interrelated and interwoven together, and the distribution of the political power in a society has strong implications for distribution of economic power and resources.

Democratization studies and the existing theories, undoubtedly, provide important insights and guidelines for analysing and understanding of Armenia's path to democracy transition, with its challenges and further needs, and it is suggested that the empirical research and analysis of the

Armenian experience and the local insights from the ground, in their turn, will feed back and add to the body of knowledge on democratization.

## *E-Democracy*

The era of rapid diffusion of Internet and communication technology (ICT) and increasing 'internetization' all over the world gave rise to the concept of 'electronic democracy' or *e-democracy* by which the use of ICT for democracy promotion is implied. Other terms used interchangeably with *e-democracy* are *cyber-democracy* or *digital democracy*.

As with almost every aspect of our lives, use of Internet technologies has affected also the area of democracy promotion and added to what democracy means and involves. Due to the possibilities provided by the ICT, today, we can experience and take part in democracy in totally different ways and at previously unimaginable levels.

The pioneers of e-democracy advocate for an increased use of ICT for improving and enhancing the democratic practices, as those tools can enable a broader, deeper and more meaningful involvement of citizens in democratic government and can upgrade democracy to a significantly different level. Internet opens up new horizons and possibilities for access to information and freedom of expression, both of which are instrumental in promotion of democratic principles.

Could e-democracy become the long-awaited solution for citizens' disappointment with the workings of democracy today and enhance their so far rather limited participation and impact in decision-making regarding issues affecting their own lives?

The idea of harnessing ICT for the purposes of enhancing democratic practices was met with enthusiasm and high hopes more than a decade ago. The first wave is considered to be the introduction of the concept of 'e-government', which implies the use of ICT by governments for provision of services.

UNDP describes e-governance as '*a public investment in ICT to strengthen governance processes"*, and stresses that "*access to and use of ICT can provide new and innovative communication channels that empower people and give voice to those who previously had none, while allowing them to interact via networks and networking*", (UNDP[11])

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[11]http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/focus_areas/focus_access_information/
(Accessed on November 12, 2015)

There have been multiple instances of utilization of ICT tools for enhancing and promoting democracy around the world. A most common example is the government-initiated solicitation of public opinion through online voting on the matters of local importance, such as municipal construction projects, community development plans, etc. The study and reports of instances of e-democracy practice, however, showed that the initial overenthusiastic reaction to the potential of ICT for enhancing democracy had been premature. A number of questions arose in connection with the reliability and legitimacy of the citizen-government consultation via online platforms: To what extent are those who vote online representative of the local community? How will the online voting actually affect the decision-making and preferences in reality? Which percentage of the target population has access to Internet and is literate or knowledgeable enough to be able to vote on the issues affecting the community? These concerns somewhat curbed down the enthusiasm and highlighted the need for well-thought, context- and case- specific solutions in the matter of utilizing the ICT potential for improvement of democracy.

Nonetheless, the efforts to expand and improve e-governance, as well as explore, develop and utilize other platforms and opportunities provided by ICT for democracy promotion purposes, continue with great vigour today.

An example of such an undertaking is Estonia's electronic voting (i-voting) initiative, introduced and piloted in 2005, to hold legally binding elections in the country (Municipal elections were held in 2005, 2009 and 2013, Parliamentary elections – in 2007, 2011 and 2015, and European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014). In 2015 Parliamentary elections, online voting made 30.5% of the total votes cast (https://e-estonia.com/component/i-voting/). Estonian citizens can use their electronic ID numbers to log in the system and vote in elections from the comfort of their homes, in a matter of minutes. Online voting is a convenient measure also for those citizens who are abroad at the time of the elections, as they can vote from anywhere in the world. The electronic voting system has reportedly been very effective in increasing voter turnout and encouraging especially the youth to vote, as well as saving resources, such as time and money. Despite criticism and warnings issued by security experts regarding some flaws in the system (The Guardian, May 12, 2014), electronic voting continues to be promoted and practiced in Estonia and remains an issue of interest for other countries and companies that try to develop more secure and functional systems for online voting.

Other increasingly spreading ICT enabled participation options are online polling and petitioning. An example of the latter is the process used by the Scottish Parliament, where the Public Petitions Committee publishes valid petitions for a certain period of time, allowing the petitioners to attract wider public, discuss each e-petition with citizens and enlist the names and signatures of the supporters. (Smith 2009). Similarly, Estonia uses a system called TOM – 'Today I decide', where citizens can propose, discuss and refine proposals for the government (ibid.).

A new wave of interest in the use of ICT, especially the social media platforms, for democracy, social movement and civic activism purposes has been registered during the Arab Spring revolutions, most notably in Tunisia and Egypt, when Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media sites have been extensively used for the purposes of organization and coordination of the demonstrations, riots and protests of the citizens against the dictatorial regimes, as well as providing real-time information and news coverage on the events in those countries to the rest of the word.

Various views and evaluations have been voiced by democracy observers and other experts regarding the role and potential of the ICT, including social media, for democratic transformations and revolutions, ranging from quite optimistic to pessimistic ones.

Malcolm Gladwell, a journalists and writer for The New Yorker, for instance, reflecting on the role of social media tools for civic activism, argues that '*Revolution cannot be Twitted*' (Gladwell 2010), as Internet and social media mainly foster low-risk activities, such as registering or signing for some causes, donating small amounts of money, etc., while high-risk activity, such as physical participation in protests, rallies, demonstrations, or some other activity that requires commitment and could involve risky consequences, requires existence of a stronger–tie relationship, which is not possible to form on social media sites, such as Twitter, Facebook or alike. Gladwell also emphasises the issue of lack of organization and hierarchical structures on Internet, and suggests that while this can be an advantage for certain types of activities, civic activism or social movements and demonstrations are not among them, as they need strong organization, leadership and a concrete agenda in order to succeed (ibid.).

While I tend to agree with Gladwell's views on specifics of weak-tie relationships formed over Internet and their insufficiency for bringing about a revolution alone, it is impossible to deny the role of ICT as a tool for organization and coordination of any social movement, civic initiative or

revolution. Internet is a powerful tool for awareness-raising and mobilization, and can significantly increase the efficiency and impact of any of the above-mentioned activity.

Successful incorporation of ICT in such information-sensitive areas as commerce and electronic banking proves a case and serves as an inspiration for continuing the exploration of new methods and opportunities for utilizing Internet for democracy promotion and civic engagement purposes.

E-governance experience and use of ICT for democracy promotion in Armenia, together with the current gaps and opportunities in that area, are examined and discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

## *1.3. Development*

Development theories have emerged and proliferated since the $2^{nd}$ half of the twentieth century, originally aimed at *developing* the so-called 'third world' countries in South and helping lift them out of poverty by means of 'industrialization', 'modernization' and 'transferring knowledge' from the developed North to the 'under-developed' or 'developing' South. Development, which is generally defined as *growth*, *advancement* and *progress* - "*the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc.*" (Oxford dictionary online[12]), in case of countries and localities, has been also defined as a positive or 'good 'change (Chambers 1997).

The number of the developing countries rapidly increased in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the independent democratic states that emerged from it, faced the problem of rebuilding their economies from scratch, as a result of the disruption of the former organizational structure and ties.

The majority of the newly formed 'transitional' states were in a state of deep crisis and needed urgent help with reviving their economies, addressing the issues of inflation, fast-spreading poverty, unemployment, migration, etc.
World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations and other organizations active in the field of International Development offered aid - loans and expertise for fighting poverty and addressing the critical issues in the developing countries.
As a condition for loan provision, Washington DC based International financial organizations (IMF, World Bank and US Treasury Department) promoted implementation of liberal ideology-

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[12] www.oxforddictionaries.com

based structural adjustment reforms in the developing countries. "The Washington Consensus" – a set of ten standard economic policy measures, formulated by the English economist John Williamson, was spearheaded by IMF, World Bank and US Treasury in the crisis ridden countries as a 'prescription' for reforming their economies. Centred around boosting economic growth, the reform package included policies aimed at macroeconomic stabilization, liberalization of trade, investment, and expansion of markets within domestic economy (fiscal discipline, privatization of state-owned property, tax reform, rolling back the role of the state, etc.).

Post-Washington Consensus and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), subsequently, came to redress some critique and omissions of the Washington Consensus, by drawing more attention to the need to increase social spending on health and education and place sustainable and democratic development at the top of the agenda.

While development initially focused mainly around economic growth, since it was believed that the benefits of growth would eventually reach other sectors and improve the quality of life of all the layers of the population, experience in the countries of Latin America, South East Asia and elsewhere proved those policies and theories lacking: economic growth (increase in GDP) did not automatically result in improvement of the well-being of the population or equal distribution of the wealth. Development discourse has gradually evolved and moved from the narrow perception of poverty and focus on the economic growth to recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and focus on human development, which centres around equality of opportunities, freedom, choice, capabilities (Sen 1999), participation, education, gender equality, etc. (http://hdr.undp.org).

Numerous authors have attempted to shed light on the relationship and causal direction between democracy and development, and have arrived at different conclusions supporting two main types of arguments: 1) democracy is a pre-requisite for development, and 2) the opposite argument- that authoritarian regimes are better at promoting development. The evidence in favour of both arguments, however, is still inconclusive and very much contested (UNDP 2002; Menocal 2007, etc.). While this dissertation does not engage with the discourse on the link and the causal direction between the two concepts and takes as a given that development and democratization processes go hand in hand in Armenia, it is still worth noting that there is an increasing realization of the important role of democracy and good governance for development (UNDP 2002). The findings of many studies indicate that weak governance and widespread corruption account for

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persistent poverty and undermine the development efforts in a number of counties (ibid.). It has been also increasingly acknowledged that transparency, accountability, public participation, rule of law, which implies that everybody is equal before the law, are principles which have a potential to make institutions and rules more effective and democratic.

UNDP's Human Development Report 2002, highlights the fact that good governance is democratic governance, which implies:

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Ability to take part in decision-making affecting one's life;
- Ability to hold decision-makers accountable;
- Inclusive and fair rules and institutions governing social interactions;
- Gender equality and participation of women in public life and decision-making equally with men;
- Freedom from any kind of discrimination (race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc.);
- Reflection of the needs of future generations in policies;
- Policies responsive to people's needs;
- Policies aimed at eradicating poverty and enhancing people's opportunities in life

 (UNDP 2002: 51).

The report stresses the importance of promoting participation through democratic governance, and highlights participation as the third pillar of the development strategy for the 21st century, with the two other pillars being investment in education and health, and promotion of equitable growth (HDR 2002:53).

UNDP's Millennium Declaration emphasises the importance of inclusive participation and broad-based citizen involvement for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Participation is also at the centre of the UNDP's Post-2015 development agenda (UNDP 2014), which stresses the importance of participation of all the stakeholders, including civil society and private sectors, for better informed and more sustainable policies, better accountability and transparency, as well as emphasises the role of building capacity and institutions to allow more effective implementation of the development agenda.

The idea of people's participation in their own development grew to prominence in the development discourse after the failures of the 'top-down' approaches and modernization theories, and 'participation' became one of the 'buzz words'. Although there are different views

on what participation entails, for the definition of the term many scholars go back to the UN's Economic and Social Council Resolution of 1929, which states that "participation requires voluntary and democratic involvement of people in (a) contributing to the development effort, (b) sharing equitably in the benefits derived therefrom, and (c) taking part in decision-making - setting goals, formulating policies, planning and implementing projects aimed at economic and social development" (Midgley et al 1986:25).

The World Bank describes participation as a social, cultural and institutional context, where citizens are empowered to "participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (World Bank 2002:11).

The UNDP's 1993 Human Development Report (HDR) highlights the role of participation for achievement of effective development in the transition countries and stresses the need for the governance system and patterns to embrace the participation of people in the events shaping their own lives. The report defines civic engagement as *"a process, not an event that closely involves people in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives."* Civic engagement in this sense is seen "as an aim and as a means in itself".

While arguing that citizens have an 'impatient urge' to participate in and influence the processes that have a direct bearing on the their lives and its quality, the HDR (1993) also warns about the dangers that can arise in cases when such an 'urge' clashes with inflexible governance systems. Indeed, the history has illustrated that anarchy, social disintegration, ethnic violence, civil wars and revolutions can occur when the governance system opposes or blocks citizen participation. On the other hand, if the governments create a nurturing and enabling environment for citizen participation, it can bring about enormous benefits and be a source of innovations, leading to more just, inclusive and sustainable development of the societies (HDR 1993:1).

The role and potential of civil society and civic engagement for fostering economic development has been increasingly acknowledged and incorporated in the development practice. Civic engagement and social capital have been found to be important factors and measures contributing to the success of development efforts (Putnam 2000; Krishna 2000, etc.)

There is a growing consensus that for local and regional development policies to be successful, they should be based on participation and social dialogue, should be locally owned and designed

with the consideration of the local context and the 'indigenous knowledge' (Pike et al 2006; Sillitoe et al 2002, etc.).

Based on the empirical evidence, however, many development practitioners and observers have differentiated between genuine and pseudo-participation; while some have challenged the idea of participation, making a case for it to become tyranny imposed on the vulnerable and marginalized people who, in many cases, lack resources to participate (Cooke, Kothari 2001).

Since empirical evidence has demonstrated that such 'pseudo-participation' or 'forced' participation practices have been largely ineffective in the development practice, the accent in the 'participation' discourse has gradually shifted to recognizing the importance of the *agency* and *capacity* of people who participate, and started evolving around *civic participation, civic engagement, civic capacity*, and participation of formal and informal civil society organizations (CSOs) in development.

Notwithstanding the latest development theories and the efforts of the international community to promote participatory approaches to development, evidence suggests that a number of developing countries, including Armenia, continue building their development and anti-poverty strategies based on the narrow, materialistic perception of the concept of poverty, placing solely economic growth at the core of their poverty reduction efforts and paying very little attention to other aspects of poverty, such as human poverty, lack of opportunities and capabilities, as well as largely overlooking the involvement and participation of citizens in the local development efforts (UNDP Armenia 2005, Babajanian 2006). As a result, the public policies and strategies in these contexts have failed to respond to the needs of people and result in tangible improvement in their well-being.

The need to attach more importance to creation of opportunities for people to voice their priorities and take part in the solution of their own problems, as well as the need to improve access to information, the laws and legislation for all the layers of the population and promote citizens' participation in decision-making has been repeatedly emphasized by a number of local and international organizations operating in Armenia (e.g. IDHR, UNDP, USAID).

Empowering people, increasing their civic awareness and building their capacity to become civically more active and engage in an open dialogue with the state, take part in decision-making on the issues affecting their lives, as well as improving the current institutional setting and

incorporating democratic principles, values and norms in the public and other spheres are seen as the main challenges and cornerstones for promoting development and democratization in the post-soviet countries, including Armenia.

## *1.4. Civil Society*

It has been long acknowledged that the role of civil society or non-state actors is critical in counterbalancing the state, representing various groups of people and voicing their needs and problems. The 'schools of democracy', as Alexis de Tocqueville has famously referred to the civil society organizations, indeed, have a great potential to promote democracy and contribute to development.

The concept of Civil Society has been a subject of hot discussions and controversy over the past centuries. The term has been formulated and reformulated by nearly all the significant western thinkers and political philosophers, and was perceived in different ways during different periods in history.

The history of the concept of Civil Society can be traced back to the ancient Greek and Roman times where it was conceived as a commonwealth, and the term was synonymous with 'political community' which was bound by rules limiting individual rights, as well as by civility - requiring mutual respect for others' rights (Wiarda 2003).

Aristotle, for example, saw civil society [*politiké koinonia*] as the society, *the polis,* which contained and dominated all others (Keane 1988).

During the Enlightenment period, the concept of the Civil Society was a subject of intensive debates. The early modern theorists Locke, Hobbes and Kant wrote on Civil Society as of a multi-layered associational sphere, which, being private, however, is based on the notions of equality before the law and the right to free association (Kothari and Minogue 2002). Civil Society and the state (*polis)* were still used as interchangeable terms, and to be a member of civil society meant to be a citizen- a member of the state- having certain rights and responsibilities, abiding by certain laws and not engaging in acts which were harmful to other citizens (Keane 1988).

Unlike the early modernists, the classical political economists of the 18th century (Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith) saw society characterised by production, economic exchange, division of labour and dominance of private needs. Even though they treated Civil Society and economy as nearly the same, they were the first to separate the 'civil' from 'political'. By the late eighteenth

century the civil society seized to be seen as the nature of the state and was thought of as a means against potential abuse of the power by political majorities. Thus, it was recognized that the most efficient way of opposing the corrupting influences of the power was to encourage the creation of citizens' associations (Harbeson et al, 1994).

Alexis de Tocqueville drew attention to the state despotism inherent to the democratic rule. He was concerned by the "tyranny of majority" and the contradictions existing in the democratic principles of freedom and equality; according to de Tocqueville, civil organizations, representing the "independent eye of society" and being made up of "a plurality of interacting, self-organized and constantly vigilant civil associations, whose functions were to nurture basic rights, to advocate popular claims, and to educate citizens in the democratic arts of tolerance and accommodation" should constantly oversee and check the state and its functions, or, in other words, *"hold back the tyranny of the state"* (ibid.:54).

German philosopher Hegel was more sceptical of civil society, considering it to be conflictual and unstable, because of the individuals pursuing their private interests and thereby creating tension. He argued that "civil society" cannot remain "civil" unless it is controlled by the state, i.e. subjected to 'the higher surveillance' of the state (Harbeson et al, 1994). In Hegel's view the state can legitimately intervene in the *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (civil society) and its affairs to remedy injustices or inequalities within the latter or to protect some universal interest of the population (Keane 1988).

Marx, who is considered to be one of the main antagonists of the civil society, saw it as a bourgeois society and an arena of class conflict. In his opinion, civil society was an illusion, since the apparent freedom it gives to individuals merely conceals the underlying realities of class exploitation (Hann and Dunn 1996).

Another civil society theorist, Antonio Gramsci used Marxist categories, but came to different conclusions: his view was that there were two major superstructures- political society and civil society; the former embodies force, the latter manufactures consent (Keane 1988). For Gramsci, civil society encompassed all the ideological - cultural (and not material or commercial) relations and spiritual life, and represented a space where groups compete for hegemony (ibid.).

Civil Society and its definition has been the subject of political and philosophical debate for many centuries.

Up to present, there is no single, all-inclusive definition of the term, and many authors note that definition depends on the purpose for which the term is used or on the task at hand (e.g. Eberly 2002). Most commonly the term refers to *the sphere of public, which is beyond the control of the state*, or *the sphere in-between a person and the state*.

A working definition of civil society, adopted for the framework of this study, is the one provided by Cohen and Arato (1994:ix):

 "[Civil Society is] *a sphere of social interaction between economy and the state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication*."

Some of other definitions of civil society given by scholars and organizations are presented below:

- *"Civil society consists of those mediating institutions (families, friends, neighbours, communities, churches, civic organizations and informal institutions) that intervene between the individual and the state and serve both as a corrective to both excessive individualism and to an overweening state."* (Eberly 2002: 95).
- *"Civil society is a sphere of association in society in distinction to the state, involving a network of institutions through which society and groups within it represent themselves"* (Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex).

- *"Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values"* (Centre for Civil Society, LSE).

The World Bank gives the following definition to the term:

"*Civil Society is the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations refer to community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations*" (http://web.worldbank.org).

All these definitions add to each other, providing a comprehensive description of the term, and stress the main elements of this complex concept – *civil society is a domain of action, interaction and association, different from the state and the family, and called to further common interests and balance the power of state.*

It can be argued that the stronger the civil society is, the more capacity it will have to influence the processes taking place within the government, thereby promoting democracy and good governance. Vigorous civil society is considered to be a critical factor for a responsive and effective government (Putnam 1992). As Diamond argues, *"by checking and limiting the power of the state, civil society stimulates political participation, develops a democratic culture of tolerance and bargaining, creates additional channels for articulating and representing interests, generates cross-cutting cleavages, recruits and trains new political leaders, improves the functioning of democratic institutions, widens and enriches the flow of information to citizens, and produces supporting coalitions on behalf of economic reform"* (in Howard 2003:43).

However, all the aforementioned virtues of civil society, that strengthen and legitimate a democratic state and enhance good governance, are usually applied in relation to civil society in Western countries. In contrast, civil societies in transition countries are often described as anaemic and unable to effectively counterbalance the state and contribute to the democratization (Haynes 1997; Howard 2003, etc.).

The concept of civil society is believed to have made a dramatic comeback at the end of the 1980-es, when it was rediscovered and revitalized by dissidents (most notably, by the Polish opposition movement), and have had an important role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The euphoria surrounding the concept of civil society, however, did not last long in the post-communist countries, giving way to distrust and disillusionment of the population with the concept, the reasons for which are manifold, as it will be discussed below.

In his analysis of the differences in the civil society in Central European and the post-communist countries, Howard (2003) demonstrates that there is a 'thick line', or a 'stark difference' between the variations of civic society in those two settings. Using the Wold Value Survey (WVS) data, Howard shows that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of the population of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) and former Soviet Union (FSU) countries regarding a

number of indicators responsible for the quality and 'strength' of the civil society in those two different settings:

- *The level of support to the current regime:* the WVS data demonstrate, that in the FSU countries, the support to the current regime is considerably lower (29%) than that in the CEE countries (55.6 %).
- *Distrust in civil and political institutions,* on the other hand, is much higher in the FSU block: 45% versus 28% in the CEE.
- *The average number of organizational memberships per person*, is considerably higher in the CEE countries (1.09%), compared to that of the FSU (0.61%).

Analyzing the common similarities in the history and the trajectories of democratization of those countries, Howard concludes that the weak pattern of civil society in the post-soviet countries is conditioned by the following three main factors: *(1) mistrust of communist organizations, (2) persistence of friendship networks, and (3) postcommunist disappointment*.

While it is most commonly considered that in the former Soviet Union there was no civil society in the sense of the concept as we know it today, in fact, there were some artificially created by the state organizations and unions, labeled '*public organizations'* in which membership was mandatory (e.g. 'pioneer organization', 'komsomol', labour unions, etc.). People were forced to join those state controlled organizations, and perform certain 'duties', ranging from memorizing and reciting the key communist texts and postulates, paying the membership fees to performing organizational and other 'volunteer' work. This experience was mostly qualified as 'unpleasant', described by many respondents as 'causing antipathy and aversion' (Howard 2003). Thus, it is suggested that this negative experience, aversion and distrust to 'organizations' has been stereotyped and transferred to any type of 'public organization', even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, preventing people from joining civil society organizations (ibid.).

The second explanation of the weakness of the civil society, according to Howard, is the existence of vibrant friendship networks during the soviet times. Narrow circles of trusted family and relatives were the only arena where people under the communist rule could freely express themselves without being afraid of political pressures, as well as turn for support, given the shortage of economy and goods. It is suggested that persistence of these networks after the fall of communism could have removed the need and desire for joining other organizations.

According to Howard, the third factor responsible for the weakness of post-soviet civil society is the disappointment of people with the regimes established after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Being excited about the newly regained freedoms – to speak, to associate, to travel behind the 'iron curtain', and hopeful about the establishment of new political and economic institutions, people had certain expectations about their future, which were, however, crashed by the reality that proved those institutions unable to deal with the plethora of issues that arose from the disruption of the former organization. The incapacity of the new system to meet the needs of the population caused widespread disillusionment, apathy and withdrawal of the population from politics, and distrust to the regime (ibid.)

There are, indeed, a number of obstacles to the emergence of 'vibrant' civil societies in transitional countries, including a low level of socio-economic development, dependence on donors for funding, lack of skills and organizational capacity.

Moreover, it is argued that there are different levels of weakness, which differ from one country to another. Haynes (1997) argues that the strength of civil society depends not only on the level of the economic development or industrialization of the given country, but also on a number of other factors such as, for instance, fragmentation or division of the society on the basis of ethnicity and religion.

When the majority of the civil society organizations are weak in a country and, accordingly, are not self-sufficient, the state can easily buy them off or provide some support in return to gaining greater control over them. In this case it is impossible to speak of the civil society that can counterbalance the power of the state or enhance democracy.

It has been indeed established that not all types of civic society are 'good' for democracy or can foster it. Carlo Ruzza (2009) has examined and classified the organizations and associations formed around the right-wing, xenophobic, extremist, racist, and otherwise exclusionist ideas, ideologies and agendas under the rubric of '*uncivil society*' or 'bad civil society', as being essentially anti-democratic, they cannot possibly be perceived as promoting democracy.

In his book *Civil Society, Democracy and Civic Renewal,* Fullinwider (1999) mentions three main obstacles to the emergence of the civil society: (1) the government or its tendency to consider itself as a body that should govern on behalf of the citizens instead of encouraging their own self-development; (2) the market or its tendency to presume that all the civic liberty needs is to be free

from the intervention of the state; and (3) the community members or their tendency to preserve or to restore the old values and impose them on the people without giving them the right to freedom of choice.

Distrust among the members of society and inequalities (in particular between the affluent and the poor) also represent a major obstacle to the emergence of civil society (ibid.).

Another obstacle to the emergence of a healthy civil society in the developing countries could be the fact that the two sectors –state and civil society- overlap, as the same individuals may simultaneously play roles in both of those sectors, thereby limiting the opportunities for the development of a genuine civil society.

In Armenia, currently, there are more than 4500 registered CSOs (NSS 2014). However, most of them are not active due to lack of funding, as indicated by a number of studies and reports (Yudaeva 2002; Ishkanian 2003; Freedom House 2010).

Besides the formal and registered civil society organizations (CSOs) (NGOs, registered associations, unions, etc.), the recent years also saw the spread of non-registered Community – based organizations (CBOs) and grassroots throughout the post-soviet states, including Armenia. CBOs, however, are a relatively new concept that has been introduced by international organizations operating in these countries (e.g. USAID, Eurasia Foundation, World Bank, etc.), in at attempt to make a shift from the narrow perception of civil society, which had previously mainly focused on NGOs and their capacity-building.

The CBOs represent self-organized groups of people who come together to raise and address their community issues. In Armenia, these groups are not registered with the state, and within the Armenian legislative system, they are currently not eligible for any grants from the government or donor organizations, as they cannot carry out accounting, submit financial reports, and cannot be subject to taxation[13].

The term 'Community-based organization' is commonly defined as a locally based organization formed from the members of the local community to address and further community interests. While the term has been defined in different country settings in slightly different ways - to reflect

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[13] Armenian legislation does not stipulate tax exemptions for CSOs, except for the amount of money received as a grant from a donor (Republic of Armenia Law on NGOs)

the local realities and distinct characteristics (e.g. UNDP Kyrgyzstan 2003, etc.), the main features of the CBOs remain geographical boundedness (community) and promotion of *own* interests, unlike other civil society organizations, such as NGOs, for instance, which usually provide services to others and address the needs of the target groups the interests of which they have been established to represent; CBOs are also considered to be closer to the people and, therefore, more effective in reaching excluded and underrepresented groups (World Bank).

This research is particularly concerned with the activities of the community based organizations and grassroots, civic movements and activities of groups which are not registered officially with the state and, as a result, in the framework of the Armenian legislation, are not in position to receive grants for their activities. The underlying assumption is that those groups and organizations are driven by genuine interest in the solution of the local problems and making a contribution to the betterment of their and their community's lives, as they act on voluntary basis and are not being paid by any local, national or international organization for their activities.

Dependence of CSOs on donor money in post-soviet countries and the observation that their activity is mainly being driven by income-deriving motives, rather than engaging in voluntary action, has been stressed in the research of many authors. Uhlin (2009), for instance, coming to the similar conclusion in his research, argues that not all types of CSOs have an effect on democracy: weak and donor funding dependent CSOs can have a very limited, if any, role in promoting democracy. Henderson (2002) in her assessment of NGOs in Russia argues that NGOs in the post-soviet context do not set their own agendas and act on the local needs, instead, they respond to the agendas set by the donors and 'sell civil society', which can hardly have any significant or lasting effect on democracy or civil society strengthening in the country. Henderson contends that the international agencies promote creation of a new class – 'the new elite'- 'the project class' - the CSO leaders, who work to access donor money and are guided by wrong incentives and interests (ibid.). Adopting a neo-institutionalist approach, the author argues that the Russia's civil society is influenced by the interplay of three factors: institutions, incentives and interests. While admitting that the Western aid resulted in substantial increase in the organization capacity of the civil society groups through trainings and other capacity building efforts, Henderson notes that it wasn't able to strengthen horizontal ties, networks and grassroots activity, but instead, the Western aid fostered emergence of vertical, institutionalized and isolated 'civic community' (ibid.).

The concern that the main interest of the civic organizations in the newly founded democracies in the post-soviet space was winning the 'Grant game' and receiving funding for a proposed project has been voiced by a number of authors, including Henderson (2002), Ishkanian (2006), and others.

Suggesting that the NGOs were 'selling civil society' to the donors in search of grant money, Henderson (2002) contends that both players – the donors and the NGOs, in this case, sought short-term pay-offs rather than long–term benefits and development of a genuine civic community in Russia. She suggests that if the donors wish to build horizontal civic community and contribute to increase of social capital that would promote development of civil society, they need to change their policies and create an incentive structure that would be conductive for a specific set of behaviours (ibid.).

Another common problem, often mentioned by the researchers studying civil society in the post-communist contexts, is the lack of visible constituency behind it – many of the 'engineered' or 'artificially created' civil society groups and leaders seem to have no followers (Henderson 2002, Ishkanian 2006), or any connection with the society (Sargsyan 2014). Being funded by the donor organizations, many of such NGOs are more accountable to them, rather than to the general public, and often ignore the need to spread information on their mission and activities to the society (ibid.).

Babajanian (2006), on the other hand, argues that the research in post-soviet civil society has been biased towards the western model of civil society, and therefore, failed to capture the communal forms of civil society existing in the post-soviet Armenia. He suggests that the main obstacles to participation of people are not related to the 'soviet mentality' or cultural factors, as a number of observers maintain (e.g. Mondak and Gearing 1998; UNDP 2002), but are due to the lack of material resources, time and local capacity, as well as the willingness of the community members and the local government to cooperate. As an important factor, impeding civic participation in the post-soviet environment, Babajanian stresses poor governance and unwillingness of local leaders to share power and engage in collective action with the community members.

Creation of a strong and viable civil society, however, cannot be expected to be an easy task that would be feasible to accomplish in a few years or even decades.

The available research indicates that the 'quality' of civil society and independent institutions depends on numerous factors, such as history of the given location (path-dependency) (e.g.

Putnam 1993), civic capacity of the people (Briggs 2008), and the stocks of social capital existing in the locality (Putnam 2001), to name a few. Quoting the political scientist Ralf Dahrendorf:

> *"It takes six months to create new political institutions, to write a constitution and electoral laws; it may take six years to create a half-way viable economy; it will probably take sixty years to create a civic society. Autonomous institutions are probably the hardest thing to bring about".*

Howard (2003), in his prognosis regarding the future of the civil society in the post-communist countries, contends that several decades are needed for any meaningful and lasting change to occur in the habits and attitudes of the people, and the pattern of weak civil society is likely to stay unchanged for many years to come. He argues that only generational change might be able to bring about societal change, which can reverse the current trends in the post-soviet countries, changing the current patterns, increasing organizational membership, as well as increasing trust to civil society organizations and the government. But in this, Howard stresses the role of the state, and suggests that the governments and international donors should rethink their role and focus their efforts on development of local groups and organizations by expanding the capacities and activities of the latter, and not merely dictating their vision and methods of development for them.

Building local civic capacity is indeed a critical measure for ensuring further development and 'strength' of the civil society in the newly democratic states.

## *1.5. Conclusion*

With the view of providing a theoretical framework for the research on civic participation, this chapter has explored the definitions, types and specifics of the concepts of democracy, development and civil society, paying a close attention to their qualities and peculiarities in the post-soviet transition countries and the relation of those concepts with civic participation, as it has been argued that the context in which civic participation is taking place is of critical importance for its quality, magnitude and impact.

It has been suggested that the quality and health of democracy and civil society, as well as the level of economic development in a given locality can significantly affect the level and magnitude of civic participation, by either enabling and fostering, or impeding and blocking it.

Being an important pillar of democracy, civic participation, in its turn, greatly depends on properly functioning democratic institutions and a viable civil society.

While the transfer of liberal democracy to the newly democratic states has proved to be a challenging process, full of controversies and reversals, it has been argued that the success of this efforts has been largely contingent on the countries' capacity to 'democratize', the potential of which depends on numerous factors, including those embedded in the historical, political, cultural and economic contexts of the countries.

It has been discussed that in most of the transitioning states, due to the specifics of the aforementioned contexts, the established institutions failed to become truly inclusive and democratic, rather, becoming 'extractive' and catering to the needs and agendas of a handful of elite in power. It has been suggested that these countries have entered a unique zone, with its distinct peculiarities and a specific mix of ingredients, determining their democratic, political and economic processes.

Taking into account the diverse historical, cultural, political and economic realities existing in the transitioning countries, it has been proposed to further ground the ideas of 'multiple transitions' and 'multiple democracies' in the discourse and practice with democratization and development, and examine each context separately, with its unique features and ingredients, in order to be able to devise tailored solutions for fostering the processes of democratization and development in the given setting, as well as creating more favourable environment for civic participation.

The importance of political culture and political institutions of the given locality has been emphasized, as they lay the basis for building the economic institutions, that could either be conducive to further development, or on opposite, could restrict it, by blocking any innovation and change that might reset the power balance in the given context.

In the discussion of democracy and civic participation, this chapter has also outlined the concept of 'democratic innovations' (Smith 2009) with a particular emphasis on participatory and deliberative models of democracy that evolve around the idea of an *active citizen* and *citizen participation* in deliberation and decision-making on issues affecting their lives. The importance and role of societal monitoring – 'counter-democracy' (Rosanvallon 2008) and the 'watch-dog' functions of the citizens and civil society organizations – 'monitory democracy' (Keane 2009) has

been emphasised for improvement of government accountability and transparency and achievement of democratic progress.

Another democratic innovation - *e-democracy* and the opportunities for promoting democratic practices and enhancing citizen participation in democracy via Internet and communication technology (ICT) have been closely examined and discussed. It has been argued, that, while certain caution and consideration of the specifics of *e-participation* is necessary, ICT, nevertheless, has a strong potential for increasing democratic participation and improving the quality of democracy. Therefore, further research and expansion of ICT possibilities in this area is deemed worthwhile.

It has been argued that citizen participation in decision-making and policy formation processes can result not only in progress with democracy, but also in more effective and targeted solutions to the existing development challenges. This is especially relevant in case of the developing countries, where the resources at the disposal of the local communities are typically scarce and their targeting to priority areas is critical.

Citizen participation in the community affairs and collaboration with local government has been identified as an important factor, contributing to local development and enhancing the economic opportunities of the communities.

The chapter has also discussed the concept of civil society and its role in fostering democracy by counterweighing the state – checking and limiting its power, as well as demanding accountability and transparency from it.

While it has been widely recognized that a strong and healthy civil society is vital for democracy, civil society in the young democracies has been mostly found to be weak, lacking organizational capacity and independence, mostly being reliant on donor funding and driven by donor-set agendas. It has been argued that chasing grant money and failing to raise and address the real issues existing on the ground, this 'civil society' fundamentally differs from the Western model of civil society and, understandably, can have very little, if any, impact on the process of democratization.

The weakness of civil society in the post-communist countries has been ascribed to several factors, including the communist legacy - distrust to organizations under the communist rule, over-reliance on close family and friends circle, which has eliminated the need to join organizations, as

well as distrust and disillusionment with the new system of government and institutions (Howard 2003).

Civil society in most of the post-soviet states has been characterized as artificially created, anaemic and unable to counterbalance the state and exert checks and balances on it. This statement seems to hold true also in case of Armenia, where only a small portion of the registered NGOs has an active (on-going) project, receiving money from local or international donors, or the state.

On the other hand, it has been argued that the concept of civil society in the post-communist countries had been reduced to NGOs and, therefore, focused mainly on their study and analysis, leaving out other important forms of civil society, such as CBOs, grassroots and civic movements. It has been suggested that, unlike the NGOs, which, due to the above-mentioned reasons, do not enjoy much trust in Armenia, the Community-based organizations (CBOs) and grassroots that have been mushrooming across the country during the recent years, could play an important role in democracy promotion. As CBOs and grassroots are ineligible for funding under the current Armenian legislature, these organizations and their members mostly work on volunteer basis, by contributing their time, skills and knowledge for the betterment of their own communities. A closer study of those grassroots organizations, their activities, members and their motives to get involved in the community affairs could shed more light on this new in the Armenian reality phenomenon, and demonstrate whether these CBOs and grassroots can be considered as a step forward on the path of building a genuine and strong civil society that will have a potential to foster the processes of democratization and development in the post-communist context of Armenia.

This chapter has laid the theoretical basis for research into democratization and development efforts and the role of civic participation in them in post-soviet Armenia, and has outlined the key aspects and issues for further exploration and analysis within the framework of this study.

# CHAPTER 2. CIVIC PARTICIPATION: CONCEPT, INDICATORS, DETERMINANTS

## *2.1. Introduction*

Over the previous quarter of a century, alongside the victorious march of liberal democracy across the world and a renewed attention to the concept of democracy, the idea of civic participation, as a backbone of any healthy democracy, grew to prominence and became a subject of research, discussions and debates among the scholars and practitioners.

It has been increasingly recognized that the quality of democratic transformation can be greatly affected by the level and magnitude of civic engagement of the population. Numerous authors have launched queries into civic engagement and its levels in Europe, America and elsewhere to make projections and gauge about the future of citizenship and democracy.

Various factors, ranging from individual characteristics of a person and resources at his/her disposal - time, money, education, including civic or democratic education, etc., to more contextually and institutionally conditioned factors, such as access to ICT, social capital stocks in the given locality, capacity and attitude of the local and national government toward collaboration with citizens, CSOs, SMEs, and so on, have been found to influence the level of civic participation.

The link of civic engagement and social capital has been another contested topic that drew much attention, particularly after the publication of Putnam's seminal work "Bowling Alone" (2000).

As a part of their democracy strengthening agenda, many international organizations started funding and implementing interventions aimed at promoting civic participation in the emerging democracies. Those initiatives ranged from increasing the awareness on democratic citizenship via organization of civic education classes and trainings, to providing funding to civically active groups of citizens for implementation of small community development/improvement projects.

But what does the concept of civic participation entail? What are the indicators of civic participation and how can it be measured? What are the determinants of civic participation, and why certain localities seem to be more civically active than others?

This chapter sheds light on the concept of civic participation - what it is and what it entails, and examines its indicators and determinants, with a view of providing a comprehensive framework for analysis and measurement of civic participation.

## 2.2. Civic Participation

The term 'civic participation' or 'civic engagement' has been defined in numerous ways in the literature, depending on the purposes and perspectives of the user. While there is no single and widely accepted definition of this term, it is most commonly used to denote the following four broad areas:

(1) *'Community service'* – participation in voluntary service for community either as an individual or a member of a group;

(2) *'Collective action'* - "any activity where people come together in their role as citizens" (Diller 2001:22);

(3) *'Political involvement'* where resolving problems through political processes is implied (ibid.), and

(4) *'Social change'* – participation of citizens in the community's life with the aim of bringing positive changes in their future (Adler, Goggin 2005).

A comprehensive definition of civic engagement has been offered by Delli Carpini[14]:

*"One useful definition of civic engagement is the following: individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy."*

In the book "Civic Responsibility and Higher Education" (Ehrlich 2000), the term is explained in the following way:

*"Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."* (Ehlrich 2000: vi).

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[14] Michael X Delli Carpini, Dean Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, former Director, Public Policy, The Pew Charitable Trusts, http://alliance1.org/ce/defining-civic-engagement

Putnam (1993) uses the term "citizenship in civic community" to imply participation in public affairs. He further contends that participation in civic community does not necessarily imply altruism, and that it can also encompass pursuit of narrow self-interests by citizens, as far as those self-interests fit in the broader context of public needs and contribution to the betterment of the community life, thus, bringing shared benefits to the community.

In his famous book "Bowling Alone" (2000) Putnam uses the term civic engagement quite broadly, implying membership in various associations – political, community, religious, recreational, sports, etc., and stresses the capacity of civic engagement to generate social capital and improve the wellbeing of communities.

Other definitions of civic participation or civic engagement usually imply the collaborative effort directed to addressing issues that improve the well-being of those affected.

> *"It [civic engagement] often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, and serves as a catalyst for changing policies, programs, and practices"* (Rutgers School of Public Affairs[15]).

Often the terms 'civic participation' or 'civic engagement' are used to describe a range of *voluntary civic activities*, which serve to address social or community issues, and while not being political per se, they, however, can affect the political landscape and choices in their mission to improve the collective well-being and the future of the communities.

NCOC (National Conference on Citizenship), in a report on "Civic Health in America" uses the term 'civic engagement' to refer to 'activities that build on the collective resources, skills, expertise, and knowledge of citizens to improve the quality of life in the communities" (NCOC 2010a:1). NCOC defines civic engagement as "…a composite of five frequently measured and discussed forms of civic participation: (1) voting, (2) volunteering, (3) working with neighbours to fix a problem in the community, (4) expression of political voice, (5) financial contributions to voluntary organizations" (NCOC 2010b:1).

In this paper, the term 'civic participation' is used in line with the above-mentioned definitions and meanings to refer to voluntary action and participation of citizens in the community and public life with the view of improving the conditions of life for themselves and the whole community, and shaping their own future by exercising their civic rights and freedoms, and as

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[15] http://njdatabank.newark.rutgers.edu/civic-engagement (accessed on September 2, 2014)

active citizens, participating in decision-making regarding the issues affecting their and their communities' lives.

The activities implied by 'civic participation' in this paper range from participation in public works in community (repair, reconstruction, etc.), cooperation and collective action with other citizens, local, regional, state and non–state actors to solve community problems, to lobbying the local and national government, demanding accountability, transparency, writing letters to officials, campaigning and protesting, engaging in online campaigns, signing petitions, and voting in elections.

The following table illustrates the civic participation continuity as a spectrum of activities classified according to the degree of their formality (from informal to formal) and the agent type (individual and community/group). The list of activities is by no means conclusive; the table only provides a visual classification of examples of what is implied by the term *civic participation* or *civic engagement* in this study. The distinction between formal and informal, as well as individual and community/group activities, however, is not always clear-cut: actions can entail different degrees of formality or informality, and can be classified as individual or collective depending on the context, the viewpoint of the user and the type of the effort being underlined (acting as an individual or a group). Whether classified as *individual* or *group/community activity*, civic participation, nevertheless, involves an individual agent, who makes the choice to spend his/her resources and get involved in a certain 'civic activity', either on his/her own, or as a member of a certain group/community, in order to influence the course of public affairs and protect or further his/her and others' interests.

*Figure 2: Range of Activities Implied by Civic Participation*

**Civic Participation Continuity**

*Types of activities: **Informal***                                        ***Formal***

***Individual***

*Examples:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Volunteering | Contributing to a cause | Voting |
| Helping a neighbour | Organizing or taking part in a boycott, protest, demonstration | Establishing an NGO, a union, other CSO |
| Helping a neighbour | Spreading news, voicing opinions on political and other events | Joining a CSO, union, league, etc. |
| Watching news<br>Listening to news on radio | Initiating or taking part in (including online) campaigns | Donating to a charity |
| Reading news in printed and digital media | Writing blogs, posting articles, comments; discussing news and events online with friends and larger audiences | Signing a petition<br><br>Writing letters to officials |
| Discussing news with family, friends | Participating in Community Council meetings, etc. | Appealing a decision (of court, government agency, etc.) |
| Boycotting a product, a brand, etc. | | Raising community issues in the local, regional, national governments and other institutions,<br><br>Running for office, etc. |

***Group/Community***

*Examples:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Working with others in community to fix a problem | Attending community meetings as a part of a group/association | Protecting/promoting interests of a certain group of people or a cause in a coalition, a CSO, a group, etc. |
| Collectively boycotting a product, a brand, etc. | Organizing and participating in protests and demonstrations as a group, etc. | Working as a member of a political party/movement, etc. |

*Source: Author's adaptation from Adler et al 2005*

Thus, 'civic participation' within the framework of this dissertation entails both political and non-political behaviours aimed at improving one's community and influencing the policy and decisions regarding the issues affecting the community's life.

## 2.3. Measuring Civic Participation: Indicators

From the first sight, measuring such a complex concept as civic participation seems to be a rather daunting task. Nevertheless, as it will be demonstrated, it can be accomplished by dismantling 'civic participation' and formulating concrete and measurable indicators. A number of organizations have attempted this, and their experience is valuable for informing this research that sets to study and measure civic participation in a post-soviet context.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development[16] (OECD), for instance, considers *trust towards government* and *voter turnout* to be the best measures of civic engagement.

The School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) at the Rutgers University in Newark, UK, provides data and analyses on a number of subjects, including civic engagement across the counties in New Jersey, UK. SPAA's civic engagement index[17] entails three dimensions, namely *community interaction*, *community involvement* and *political participation*. *Community interaction* is measured by the number of visits to the library. This is considered to be a key indicator in this dimension, and accounts for 20% of the overall civic engagement index. The indicators for the *community involvement* are the number of registered non-profit organizations per capita and the number of religious organizations per capita. This dimension accounts for 40% of the overall index. The indicators of *political participation* are the percentage of the population registered to vote and the percentage of the eligible population registered to vote, which together account for another 40% of the overall index. As stated above, SPAA, for their calculations, is using ready data collected from reliable sources, such as Department of State Elections Division and National Centre for Charitable Statistics (New Jersey DataBank Index[18]).

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[16] http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/civic-engagement/ (accessed on July 8, 2014)

[17] http://njdatabank.newark.rutgers.edu/civic-engagement (accessed on July 8, 2014)

[18] Civic Engagement, Volume 1, Issue 1, available at
https://njdatabank.newark.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/files/civic_engagement/newsletter%20-%20NJDataBankIndex%20-%20Civic%20-%203-30-12.pdf (accessed on September 23, 2014)

While data on trust and voter turnout can be obtained for Armenia, they do not provide comprehensive information on all the dimensions, forms, levels and magnitude of civic participation in the country. Neither do the indicators used by the SPAA. Besides, they would not be an accurate measure of civic participation in the Armenian context, as, for instance, the indicator *number of visits to library* wouldn't render any reliable or relevant information on community interaction, since the culture of visiting libraries and connecting with people there is sadly virtually non-existent in the present day Armenia, mainly due to the lack of funding and modernization of libraries and the book stock after the collapse of the former soviet regime.

Other indicators that have been used for measuring civic participation include membership in civic associations, hours spent volunteering (Putnam 2000), religious participation/percentage of population that belong to church, social trust and donating to charity (e.g. Messner et al 2004).

With the aim of devising indicators for measuring civic participation in Armenia, I have carefully considered all the above mentioned measures, and after a study of the available practice, decided to turn to the experience of the US non-profit organization National Conference on Citizenship (NCOC) with the intention to adapt their tools and methods for use in the context of Armenia.

NCOC has been operational since 1953 and has accrued significant expertise in measuring civic participation across the United States of America (www.ncoc.net); NCOC's Civic Health Initiative has been recognized as the nation's largest measure of civic engagement. The organization has partnered with a number of states and cities to collect civic health data throughout the USA (ibid.).

To measure civic health, the NCOC uses a number of indicators, having slightly changed and adjusted their formulation and grouping method over the course of years.

Based on the analysis of NCOC's indicator pool, the following are identified as the core areas of civic engagement with their indicators:

- *Electoral engagement*
    - Taking part in elections: voting;
    - Taking an active part in election campaigns, supporting a candidate

- *Non-electoral political engagement, i.e. engaging in political actions outside of elections*

- Contacting a political figure, local, regional or national government bodies for solution of an issue/problem or with a proposal
- Applying formally to a state agency for information
- Appealing a decision
- Boycotting a product for social values of the company

- *Group engagement or affiliation*

  - Belonging to a group or an organization – religious, neighbourhood, sports/recreational, cultural

- *Community engagement*

  - Volunteering in the community
  - Being informed about the surrounding community
  - Attending a public meeting
  - Exchanging favours with neighbours
  - Working with neighbours to fix a community problem
  - Donating to causes or projects

The NCOC is also differentiating between formal and informal ways of participation in the civil society. Formal forms of participation, according to NCOC, include volunteering and donating, group membership and leadership, while informal - include attending meetings where community issues are discussed, fixing a problem with neighbours, accessing data and information on web, etc.

Based on the relationship between social capital and civic participation, the NCOC surveys often include also indicators on interpersonal connections with the community and sharing information and news with family and friends (www.ncoc.org).

NCOC's "Civic Health' questionnaire and the presented above indicators of civic participation have been thoroughly analysed, adapted and somewhat modified to better fit the local realities and peculiarities in Armenia.

The following 5 areas with their indicators have been chosen to be included in the survey on Civic Participation in Armenia.

- *Community service/volunteering*: volunteering formally (through an organization – helping achieve an organization's goals, participating in fund-raising and other events, various projects, etc.) or informally (helping a neighbour, fixing a common problem in the community, taking part in community or neighbourhood clean-up and improvement initiatives, etc.).

- *Participation in a group/belonging to an organization*: membership in an organization (CSOs (registered and non-registered), unions, associations, etc.)

- *Receiving and spreading information (including via ICT) on current events and news*: watching news on TV, listening to the radio, reading newspapers, accessing online news, discussion of the news with family, friends, neighbours, using social networking sites (SNSs) to spread news on current public events and affairs, raise awareness on a global or community issue, etc.

- *Political and civic action, including online political and civic activism*: voting, involvement in campaigns, demonstrations, causes; participation in meetings where local problems are discussed, writing letters to officials, requesting written information regarding responsibilities and realization of rights, appealing, using online media including SNSs to start causes, campaigns, to appeal, to protest, etc.

- *Making donations to voluntary organizations or donating to causes*

These indicators have been used to collect data on civic participation at a randomly selected university in each of the 3 larger cities of Armenia - Yerevan (the capital), Gyumri and Vanadzor, as well as guided the discussion during focus group meetings and interviews in the 10 selected communities across Armenia.

## *2.4. Determinants of Civic Participation*

In studying civic participation, its barriers and opportunities, it is critical to examine the factors that can affect civic participation. What can facilitate and what can impede civic participation? In other words, what are the determinants of civic participation?

A good starting point in examination of the determinants of civic participation can be differentiating between individual level determinants – the factors related to individual traits,

attitudes and choices, availability of time, other resources, etc., and contextual level determinants- the political, institutional, economic, social, cultural and educational settings, which can either be enabling and favourable for civic participation, or, on the contrary, restrictive and impeding civic engagement.

The individual level determinants are, obviously, manifold. People can engage and do engage in civic life for a variety of reasons, ranging from love and care for their community to feeling of efficacy and self-accomplishment after solving an important problem for the community or the neighbourhood. Interest, motivation and resources, such as time, money, skills, education/knowledge, information, social connections are among other important individual level determinants that can affect civic participation.

It has been acknowledged, that more educated and wealthier individuals are more likely to engage in civic actions, than those less educated and less well-off (Verba et al 1995; Zukin et al 2006).

Such demographic characteristics as age and gender have also been found to be correlated with civic participation. Research, for instance, shows that in the UK or the USA, younger people are less involved in politics and vote less (Fahmy 2006, Dalton 2004, 2008) compared to the older generations. There is also certain research indicating, that women are more altruistic than men and volunteer more, while men are more likely to get involved in civic initiatives if the latter could contribute to enhancement of their career opportunities or resources (Wilson 2001).

The evidence suggesting that personal traits play a decisive role in the level of civic activism does not come as a surprise. It has been shown that extroverts are more civically active than introverts (Kavanaugh et al 2005; Keller &Berry 2003). Similarly, happier and more trusting people get more engaged in civic life than those who are unhappy, sceptical and, in general, distrustful to their fellow citizens or the government.

It has been established, that people who have larger networks or 'ties' are civically more active than those with a smaller network of friends or relatives (Putnam 2000, Son & Lin 2008, etc.).

The contextual level determinants are those embedded in the political, institutional, economic, social, cultural and technical subsystems. Factors, such as institutions (in the "rules of the game" sense), political and legal framework, cultural beliefs and traditions, available stocks of social capital, educational system and opportunities provided by the ICT, all condition and influence the level and magnitude of civic participation, by either facilitating or obstructing it.

The idea of *'civic capacity'*, which can, to a certain extend, be the explanation of why civic participation and cooperation is happening in some communities, thereby benefiting the locality and the region, and is not happening in others, has come to the fore relatively recently, and there is still quite limited research on the concept. Clarence Stone maintains that "civic capacity concerns the extent to which different sectors of the community- business, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, non-profits and others - act in concert around a matter of community-wide importance" (Stone 2001: 595). He argues that in order to be lasting, civic capacity requires an institutional basis, which will be conductive to the cooperation of the community's elites and the grassroots, or the ordinary citizens.

Xavier de Souza Briggs, in his research regarding civic capacity in communities around the world (2008:13), further elaborates on the concept of civic capacity stressing the dimension of *capacity* – i.e. to what extent the different sectors making up a community are "capable of collective action on public problems", or what he calls "a resource dimension", and that of a *will* – to what extend they "choose to apply such capacity", in other words, the "effort, will and choice, or agency dimension". His book "Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities across the Globe" (2008), Briggs bases on the view of democracy as a medium for collective problem solving, and contends that *civic capacity* is the key variable that can explain why some communities succeed in overcoming challenges and collective problem-solving, while others - fail. Briggs argues that it is not so much what the communities possess, but the way they use and leverage those resources, is the factor responsible for the success in collective problem solution and 'implementing change' (ibid.)

Over the course of the last decades several studies carried out in Europe and the USA, have indicated decline in the level of civic activism of the population, in particular that of youth, which has arisen concerns regarding the future of citizenship and citizen involvement in political and civic lives (e.g. Putnam 2001, Galston 2004, 2006, Fahmy 2006). Decrease in voter turnout, political membership and trust in political system have been among the most often indicated alarming signs, which are deemed to pose a risk to democracy.

However, the more recent research findings have been more optimistic, showing that the disengagement of the citizens is mostly related to their disillusionment with politics and governments, and while it is true that the political party membership is declining, civic activism, membership in social and community groups, associations, support to civic movements and

volunteering are, on the contrary, on rise (e.g. Dalton 2009, Keane 2009, Tisch and Weber 2010). In his book "Citizenship and the Transformation of American Society" (2009) political scientist Russell Dalton argues that the 'norms of citizenship' have changed over the recent years and the definition of what a 'good citizen' means is changing too. He argues that new patterns of citizenship have developed among the youth, and if in the past being a good citizen meant to obey the laws, to vote, to pay taxes, to trust the government, to be a member of a political party and carry out other 'duty-based' responsibilities, at present, due to changing social conditions, being a good citizen means being an 'engaged citizen', which requires much more action and involvement than previously, for example, protesting and engaging in action, questioning and holding the politicians and the government answerable for their decisions and actions, etc. Examining the new norms of citizenship, Dalton asserts that the 'duty-based' norms, which in general involve limited participatory role, are on decline in America, in particular among the youth, whereas the norms of engaged citizenship, which is based around participation and direct action, are increasing.

The emerging new model of civic engagement – *active citizenship* - is the main subject of a recent work by Tisch and Weber (2010). The authors stress that civic engagement is gaining momentum among the new generation who, in contrast to the widely held opinions, are proving to be more civically proactive, in addition to technologically equipped. Tisch and Weber highlight the transformations that occurred between the old and the new model of citizenship, leading 'from volunteerism to active citizenship', 'from charity to social entrepreneurship', 'from philanthropy to systematic change', 'from paternalism to community –based action'. In line with Dalton's research, Tisch and Weber also trace the changes in the patterns of civic engagement that are occurring in America, including the rise of '*digital citizenship*' – a new form of civic engagement made possible by technology, and suggest that all these trends can result in substantial qualitative changes in the American political system and democracy.

Access to Internet and communication technology (ICT) can indeed be an important determinant of civic participation, provided an individual chooses to use it for that purpose.

Numerous online platforms that have been created and widely used for activities that can be classified as *civic* speak for themselves. For instance, currently there are around 60000 causes registered on the website www.change.org, where any individual can start a petition regarding any issue, and petition anybody, including governments, presidents, big corporations, etc., on

environmental, health, human rights, social, economic or any other subject of concern, and invite like-minded people to sign their names in support of those causes. Numerous cases of victories on daily basis, and successfully reversed or passed decisions inspire and make people believe that democracy is not an empty rhetoric, but it is actually being practiced.

Another platform for practicing e-citizenship is www.democracyos.org, founded by a civic activist Pia Mancini (TED speaker 2014) and a group of like-minded youth from Argentine to facilitate citizen participation in politics and decision-making. Citizens can vote for various policy directions online, and the newly founded political party behind the idea ensures that their voice is heard by voting according to the majority vote on those policies or decisions.

While there are numerous similar platforms, including many successful ones, created with the view of engaging citizens in debates and decision-making in the established democracies in the US, Europe, Canada, etc., it would be interesting to find and assess the existence and outcomes of such efforts in Armenia and to gauge about the potential of e-citizenship in the young post-soviet democracies.

### 2.4.1. Social Capital and Civic Participation

The recent decades witnessed an exponentially growing body of literature on social capital and its role for democratization and development.

The term social capital refers to the networks and norms that enable people to share resources and work together (World Bank), the 'glue' that holds societies together (Narayan 1997).

Numerous authors have elaborated on the concept, types and measurement of social capital (e.g. Bordieu, Coleman, Putnam, Woolcock, Narayan, Jones, etc.), as well as on the potential of social capital to contribute to civic engagement and economic growth (e.g. Putnam, Krishna, Rossteucher, etc.).

In its most simplistic explanation, social capital means the resources embedded in the social networks/relations/contacts and the shared norms of conduct and social behaviour.

In describing social capital, authors commonly differentiate between its 'public good' and 'private good' qualities. Social capital, viewed as public good, enables the asset holders – the communities endowed by stocks of social capital - to engage in mutually beneficial collective action (Putnam 2002, Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002; Krishna 2008, etc.); whereas the 'private good' quality of social capital refers to the individual benefits and gains from social capital for separate

individuals who possess this or that kind of social capital (e.g. Granovetter 1983; Coleman 1990; Rossteutscher 2008, etc.)

Before any further discussion of social capital, its qualities and benefits, however, it has to be clarified, that not all types of social capital are 'good' or have a positive effect on development or democratic participation. Similar with the idea of 'uncivil society', social capital can also be 'bad' or 'negative', as in case of closed and exclusionist networks and groups, such as mafia, racist or terrorist groups. Depending on the means and purposes of association - whether the latter benefits the members and the society at a large or, on the contrary, represents a threat to the established norms and values, positive and negative types of social capital are distinguished. It is, therefore, important to stress that within the context of this thesis, *social capital* refers only to the positive type, i.e. the associations, groups and networks that have been created towards a positive end, and they expand the 'generative capacity' of its members (Baker and Dutton 2007: 326).

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that social capital is a strategically critical ingredient for economic growth and sustainable development (e.g. Putnam 1993, etc.). The importance of networks and trust, which have been found to reduce transaction costs, has been also increasingly stressed by many development practitioners and academics (World Bank; Pike et al 2006, etc.).

Notwithstanding the intrinsic difficulties of measuring social relationships, and such an 'inherently contextual and endogenous' concept as social capital (Woolcock 2010), during past years, innovative tools for the measurement of social capital with the help of a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches have been developed.

Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones and Woolcock, who have had a considerable input in the development of those tools, suggest six dimensions for measuring social capital - group membership, trust and solidarity, collective action, information and communication, inclusion and empowerment (2006).

While the idea of social capital has been traced down to Max Weber's work "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Trigilia 2001), the first notion of the term itself is said to be made in 1916 by L. J. Hanifan, who coined the term, explained and used it to highlight the role of community in sustaining democracy and development, as well as described the private and public benefits of social capital (Putnam 2002). However, Putnam indicates that Hanifan's conceptual invention failed to attract any interest from other writers and commentators of that time, and went

unnoticed, until the concept was independently reinvented, somewhat later in the 20th century, by at least six more academics, including Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (ibid.). From 1980s onwards, the concept, due to its significance and multidimensionality, has attracted interest of many writers from a number of disciplines (ibid.), and the following decades witnessed an explosion of research on social capital and its various aspects.

Commonly, three types or forms of social capital are identified:
- Bonding (connections to people 'like you', having roughly the same position and status in the society under which close relationships can be described; defined as the strongest type and often associated with survival);
- Bridging (connections to people 'not like you', having different position in the society; defined as 'weak ties)
- Linking (connections to people in power, hierarchical, used for leverage of resources) (Woolcock 2010).

Putnam refers to the different types of social capital also as "thick" and "thin", denoting bonding and bridging/linking types respectively, and argues that most groups possess a mixed type of social capital – a 'blend of bonding and bridging/linking social capital (Putnam 2002:12). While all the forms of social capital are considered to be important, a number of writers have differentiated between the benefits that result from different types of social capital. For instance, it has been acknowledged, that bonding social capital has a significant role for person's survival, as usually it is the family and close friends who lend a hand in difficult situations and help to meet basic needs and survive through crises (e.g. Trigilia 2001; Krishna 2008; Woolcock 2010, etc.). Whereas, it has been argued that the bridging and linking forms of social capital have more potential to generate benefits in the realms related to increase of one's opportunities, such as, for example, in labour market. Among other authors, Mark Granovetter has emphasized this idea in his famous work "Strength of Weak Ties" (1983) where he argues that lack of weak ties can put an individual in a very disadvantaged position, as s/he would have no access to information outside of his/her close circle. Granovetter illustrates how people can gain access to information and new opportunities, such as, for instance, jobs, through 'weak ties', which connect individuals to more remote and otherwise inaccessible parts of the social structure.

Social capital is also discussed in terms of the two dimensions it encompasses - (1) the cognitive dimension, which includes the norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that predispose people toward collective action, and (2) structural dimension – the network, the formal and informal roles and social connections that facilitate collective action for achieving common goals (Krishna and Prewitt 2013).

Krishna (2008) suggests that social capital can be also studied at different levels - national, community and individual. According to him, at the national level, social capital resides in institutionalized relationships and structures, such as political regimes, courts, rule of law, etc. In line with other authors, he maintains that at a community level, social capital can be regarded as an asset that facilitates communally beneficial action, and that different communities have different endowments of social capital; while at the individual level, social capital lies within the social networks and relations that help people to gain individual benefits by facilitating their actions aimed at achieving certain goals.

Krishna emphasises the importance of the community level institutions and their potential to create more social capital, which can facilitate economic outcomes. He also suggests that for measuring social capital locally and culturally suitable and tailored tools need to be devised, as they are more likely to capture all the local differences and nuances and provide more accurate measures.

In establishing linkages between social capital and development, the findings of Krishna's research demonstrate that alongside with the social capital stock existing in the given locality, the leadership skills or the 'agency capacity' of the given locality plays a significant role in the local development (Krishna 2008:455).

In his analysis of the relationship between social capital and democracy, Jan van Deth (2008) notes that positive developments especially arise from heterogeneous associations, implying 'bridging' social capital. Another proposition, made by van Deth is that, based on the logic that social capital, like any other capital, is a resource, it increases the opportunities of the individual possessing it; he draws attention to the fact that, as a result, an individual, already possessing sufficient resources, becomes less interested in participating in collective actions and democratic decision-making. Van Deth also questions the direction of causation between social capital and civic and political engagement. He argues that if a person has a high social capital and trust in the society, s/he loses the motivation and interest to participate: "Why a rational individual would

engage in political activities if he or she lives in a society with high levels of mutual trust and reciprocity" (2008:202). He suggests that social capital can also be looked at as the consequence of well-functioning democracies, not the cause.

Rossteutscher (2008), as many other authors, identifies two levels of social capital - aggregate (macro) and individual (micro) levels, and describes the aggregate level social capital as a feature of communities, and the individual level – as a personal asset. In his work, Rossteutscher characterizes social capital as trust and participation in voluntary associations, which, according to him, is the key resource for producing civically and politically active and well-informed citizenry. In his analysis, he disentangles the concept of social capital and suggests that it consists of a structural component - the network and a cultural component, which is social trust and norms of reciprocity. He also asserts that the structural and cultural components are directly related to political participation, efficiency of government and democratic citizenship. Rossteutscher emphasizes trust as an important precondition for civic engagement. In his empirical study of the social capital across the world, he finds that in post-soviet countries of Eastern Europe the level of trust is very low, as measured by volunteering and belonging to associations. His research shows, that in general, the countries that are characterized by a high level of trust have a higher degree of citizen engagement in associations. However, he stresses that this pattern does not hold for East European countries, where, according to his findings, the higher is the level of social trust, the less people join in associations; and the higher the level of the association, the lower is trust. Based on the results of his research, Rossteutscher concludes *inter alia* that "…social capital is an exclusively Western concept" and the structural and cultural components of social capital work only in western countries where the positive relationship between trust and participation in associations exists, therefore, according to him, 'the concept of social capital is not applicable outside its origin: the realm of established western democracies (2008:234-235).

In a recent study, Babajanian (2008) arrives at a conclusion that social capital is present in the Armenian communities, but it does not translate into citizen participation.

With the view to adding to the body of knowledge on availability of social capita in post-communist Armenia, the following measures/proxies, as suggested by the World Bank and the leading researchers in the area of social capital (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones and Woolcock, 2006) have been used for the primary research in the case study communities:

- Group membership,
- Trust and solidarity,
- Collective action,
- Information and communication,
- Inclusion and empowerment,
- Agency capacity of the community leaders.

In line with Babajanian's (2006, 2008) findings, this research also supports the idea of availability of social capital in the Armenian communities and suggests that the soviet system was not successful in dismantling the traditionally existing social networks – the kinship, family, neighbourhood and community ties, which have been and continue being quite strong and serve as safety nets for people. It is suggested that the communities and population survived the first harsh years of 'independence', accompanied by the crisis, mainly due to the social capital and networks. It is also suggested that the stocks of social capital that exist in the communities have not been very effective in generating and promoting civic participation not merely because of the institutions, as suggested by Babajanian (2008) and others, but also because of people's lack of knowledge of their own rights and responsibilities in a democracy, which has created serious barriers for citizen participation and exercise of civic rights. Lack of civic education and rights-related knowledge and information on the part of the citizens generates fear and amplifies people's distrust towards public institutions, making the latter more inaccessible and 'hostile' to them, and, at the same time, facilitates the enrooted practices of those institutions - corruption, rent-seeking, clientelism, patronage, etc. In the general environment of weakness of institutions and lack of rule of law (e.g. Hardy 2004; Freedom House 2010), this 'civic unawareness' creates a vicious circle that has been and is still seriously impeding the development and democratization efforts in the country. Whereas, it is argued, that 'knowledge-equipped' citizens have a potential to establish a healthy dialogue with the government, become active agents that create changes in the existing institutional context and power relations, and contribute to democracy and development.

### 2.4.2. Civic Education and Civic Participation

Over the recent decades, the declining civic and political participation of the youth in western countries has been the subject of concern for academics and policy-makers alike (e.g. Putnam

2000, 2002; UNDP 2002; Galston 2004, 2006; Fahmy 2006, etc.), and a significant body of research has evolved around the issue, analysing the trends, attempting to identify its causes and to propose remedies. As one of the causes of the decline in civic participation, many authors indicate lack of civic knowledge and civic education amongst the youth, and argue that increasing the level of civic knowledge could be an effective strategy for addressing the problem and reviving democratic citizenship (Galston, 2006, 2007; Hall and Coffey 2007, Feldman et al 2007).

But what is Civic Education? What does it entail and how and when it can be taught?

Civic Education is most commonly defined as the *study of rights and responsibilities of citizens, as well as the workings of the government, in a democratic society* (Merriam-Webster dictionary). A US-based non-profit and non-partisan organization Centre for Civic Education[19] (CCE) provides the following definition for the term:

> *"Civic Education in a democracy is education in self government. Democratic self-government means that citizens are actively involved in their own governance; they do not just passively accept the dictums of others or acquiesce to the demands of others".*

CCE identifies the following important components of civic education: *civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions.*

Civic Knowledge refers to the *subjects* that citizens should know – the political system, workings of the government, duties and responsibilities of the citizen, democratic principles, norms and values.

Civic Skills are the *intellectual and participatory skills* that the citizens need to learn and to practice in addition to the acquired knowledge on civics. Intellectual skills include *critical thinking, describing, analysing, explaining, evaluating, taking and defending* a position. These skills are critical for a responsible citizen in a democracy who is, essentially, a decision-maker.

Besides the intellectual skills, an active citizen also needs to master a set of *participatory skills* that would allow him/her to actively engage in the political processes and the civil society. Participatory skills are *interacting, monitoring and influencing.* In a democratic society, citizens should know how to interact with the government, the institutions and the fellow citizens. They need to know how to communicate, express their views and collaborate with others. *Monitoring* skills refer to the 'oversight' – the position of a 'watchdog': citizens should be informed about,

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[19] www.civiced.org (accessed on July 19, 2015)

follow and keep the track of all the policies and direction taken by the government, and finally*, influencing* refers to the ability of the citizens to have an impact on the process of decision-making, and includes voting, petitioning, advocating, etc.

CCE notes that particularly the development of participatory skills should start early –in the elementary school and continue through all the years of schooling.

As regards the third component of civic education- *civic dispositions,* they are the citizens' traits (personal and public) that are critical for democracy - for maintaining and improving it. Those traits are instilled in citizens from their childhood – at their homes, schools, community. The private traits are responsibility, justice, self-discipline, order, dignity, respect for others, etc., while the public traits include civility, respect for rule of law, tolerance, willingness to listen, negotiate, discuss, cooperate, compromise, etc. Becoming a responsible citizen implies being an independent member of the society who cares about his/her community and country, strives to solve the existing problems and improve the shortcomings, who searches for and receives information, makes an informed decision (voting, petitioning, etc.), and is otherwise guided by democratic principles and values. All these traits, or civic dispositions are essential for a democratic society. However, learning them is not an easy and fast process – there is no shortcut to mastering them; these dispositions or habits are usually being formed over a course of many years - starting from childhood and continuing into adolescence and adulthood, expanding and improving with practice and experience throughout life (www.civiced.org).

While many of democratic values and norms are instilled from early childhood – at homes, neighbourhoods, communities, pre-schools and kindergartens, usually it is considered to be the role of the elementary school to start laying the basis for democratic citizenship education.

Indeed, there is a significant body of research that confirms that schools have a big role to play in educating children about democracy and equipping them with skills and knowledge, and encouraging them to be active citizens of a democratic society (e.g. Gibson and Levine 2003). Research indicates that improving the content and methods of Civics classes at schools, as well as deliberative discussions, youth's participation in community projects and use of Internet have a significant potential to result in positive outcomes.

A study employing a quasi-experiment, pre/post education evaluation and use of control groups across the US demonstrated that curriculum had a clear effect on promoting civic and political

engagement of the young people (Kahne et al 2006). The content of the curriculum and the teaching methods, such as role play, simulation and discussion of real problems facing the community, as well as that of the ways the government operates, are stressed as effective means of raising youth's interest and motivation level to engage in civic and political affairs (ibid).

 Another study on youth's civic participation in Australia, reveals similar findings - non-engaging and passive nature of civic education at schools and the distrust to the politicians were identified as the main reasons for the decline in civic engagement among the youth (Murray 2007). As a means of increasing students' civic activism and engagement, the study suggests promoting participation in student governments, elections and school councils, as well as including courses of civic education that would be taught by well-prepared staff into the high school curriculum (ibid.).

While, undoubtedly, civic education has a critical role to play in increasing civic engagement of the youth and by extension - the overall population in established democracies, where people have been exposed to and surrounded by democratic ideas and values from their childhood –their homes, schools, neighbourhoods, TV programs, newspapers, etc., the situation is quite different in the young democracies, where people have lived under totalitarian or autocratic rule for many decades and have had virtually no experience with democracy, its core values and principles.

Declaring a country democratic and adopting a Constitution based on the principles of democracy is not sufficient to bring about real change; people cannot be expected to automatically become knowledgeable about democratic principles and values and apply them in their everyday behaviour and attitudes. In this context not only civic education of youth, but education of adult population too becomes imperative.

Recognizing the importance of civic education for the population of the young democracies, many international organizations launched and implemented programs directed to raising citizen awareness on democratic principles, human rights and freedoms. USAID alone reports devoting around 30 million USD yearly under their Democracy and Governance (DG) portfolio since 1990-es specifically for civic education programs in transitioning democracies (USAID 2002).
In 1996, USAID's Office for Democracy and Governance carried out a study to evaluate its civic education programs in the Dominican Republic, Poland and South Africa (USAID 2002). The study was examining both adult and school-based civic education initiatives, and assessing their

effectiveness and potential to influence democratic behaviours and attitudes. The findings of the research revealed that adult civic education programs had a positive impact on adults' political participation, especially at the local level, and significantly increased the trainees' knowledge about democracy, political system and institutions. The trainings, however, did not have a significant effect on changing democratic values, such as political tolerance and trust in institutions. Interestingly, the latter one – trust in institutions - appeared to be decreased after the trainings (ibid.).

The impact of the school - based civic education programs generally resonated with that of the adults', however it was found that the effects of civic education were weaker and more inconsistent among the school students. In case of school students, other factors, such as involvement of parents, school administration and the community, appeared to be strongly correlated with the success of the civic education programs.

The findings of the research, most importantly, indicated that the quality of the civic education classes or lessons and the teachers' level of preparedness and use of interactive and participatory methods played a decisive role in the overall success of the programs (USAID 2002). The recommendations of the experts, after the analysis of the research findings, highlighted the importance of frequent classes, use of participatory methods, such as simulations, role-play, etc., and connectedness of the lesson themes with the trainees' life-related concerns and events. Involving the school, parents and community in the teaching of civics at schools was stressed as another important method of increasing the impact of civic education lessons on students. Investment in teacher training programs and quality educational material were among the recommendations for increasing the efficiency of civic education initiatives.

While the international community has actively promoted civic education trainings in the new democracies, it would be interesting to examine what the governments of those countries have done in this respect, and assess the level and quality of civic education in a post-soviet country.

The results of the study of civic education quality and practice in Armenia and analysis of its adequacy for preparing knowledgeable, active and civically engaged citizens are presented in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

## *2.4.3. ICT and Civic Participation*

The rapid rise of the World Wide Web and Internet and communication technologies from 1991

onwards introduced significant changes in almost every area of our lives. Today, ICT is a part of everyday life for about one third of the population of the Earth[20] – people contact, communicate, do business, educate and get education, shop, organize their travel, leisure and numerous other areas of life by regularly using internet.

But can Internet and communication technologies be used for civic participation and support of democratization and development practices, and if so, how?

Mushrooming social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others, allowing unrestricted communication, exchange of information and content sharing, the rise of new media journalism, creation of numerous online platforms for interaction with public institutions, local and international organizations, creation of websites for petitioning, appealing, performing 'watch-dog' functions, etc., inspire hope that the answer to that question can be positive.

It is suggested that internet and communication technology, which is becoming increasingly accessible worldwide, including in Armenia, can also serve as another channel for increasing citizens' knowledge about civic rights and responsibilities and provide a medium for civic participation. Although the number of Internet users is not very large in Armenia at present, in particular, in rural communities, it is argued that the further spread of ICT can play an important role in providing citizens with information from a variety of sources, hence, impacting individual and collective opportunities.

A recent research on Internet connectivity and community participation in Israel, carried out by Mesch and Talmud (2010), for instance, indicates that internet technology has provided more channels for local civic participation and has increased the magnitude of civic engagement.

Among other objectives, this dissertation also aims to assess whether in Armenia too, in the light of the increasing spread of ICT and 'e-culture', Internet can provide another platform for civic participation, through which citizens can take part in online petitions, debates, forums, and increase their knowledge regarding civic and political issues, enlarge their outlook and make a difference in their and their communities' lives by raising and resolving critical issues, affecting development outcomes and the progress with democratization in the country.

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[20] http://www.history.com/topics/inventions/invention-of-the-internet (accessed on July 18, 2015)

Over the recent years, the potential of ICT for civic participation has been the subject of interest of many researchers, peaking especially after the Arab Spring revolutions, when social media has been actively used for sharing and spreading information on the events, as well as helping the citizens to coordinate and organize the protests and demonstrations.

The issue, however, is not as simple as it would appear from the first sight: there are numerous challenges and caveats to be mindful of, starting from the technical availability of ICT in the given locality, to the people's ability, skills, as well as motivation and desire to use the ICT for civic engagement.

Pippa Norris (2001), in a study titled "Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide", elaborates on the multidimensional nature of the 'digital divide' and suggests that it consists of three different aspects - 'the global divide'- the difference in the level of internet access in the developed and the developing countries, the 'social divide', which refers to the gap between the information rich and information poor layers of the population within each nation, and the 'democratic divide'- the gap between those who use internet resources for civic participation, mobilization and other action contributing to promotion of democracy and those, who choose not to do so (Norris 2001:4).

Internet has penetrated and become accessible to wider layers of the population in Armenia relatively recently; currently the number of users is rapidly growing. According to the available statistics, in 2000 there were only 30.000 Internet users in the country, whereas at present the number is about 1.800.000, which makes for 58.8% of the total population of Armenia (Internet World Statistics[21]). While there is no specific statistics on the 'social divide' in Armenia, the results of this and other studies indicate that the majority of Internet users are the educated urban population, and the Internet penetration rates in the rural communities are still rather low.

As regards the role of ICT for civic engagement, promotion of democracy and poverty alleviation, Norris (2001) notes that while many believe that new technologies will provide a plethora of opportunities for development and will eventually even up the inequalities and the gaps, the opinions on this matter differ. There are also sceptics who contend that new technologies alone cannot make real difference in the way people choose to use them and they will not affect or change the motivation of people to engage civically or stay disengaged, whereas the pessimistic

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[21] http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm#asia, (Accessed on September 23, 2015)

views suggest that the technology will only increase the global, social and digital divides and inequalities.

The recent facts and developments, however, indicate that there has been a considerable increase in the Internet resources conductive to civic engagement, promotion of democracy and poverty eradication. Internet has become an important tool for mobilization, supporting causes, joining groups, donating to organizations, contacting public offices and institutions, obtaining information, finding jobs, and making connections.

Mark Granovetter's 'strengths of weak ties' holds true also in the cyber-space: today, social media has become a valuable source of information and knowledge related to any area of interest one might have, and the more (online) friends from various countries and diverse backgrounds one has, the more information (from various angles and viewpoints) regarding his/her field of interest one can receive.

Analysis of the internet resources that provide the citizens with opportunities for civic participation in the context of Armenia (online media, state agencies, e-governance, etc.), as well as discussion of the ICT use habits for civic participation among the youth is presented in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

## 2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the concept of civic participation, also referred to as civic engagement or civic activism, and has explored its definitions, methods of measurement and key determinants. Most often characterized as entailing such broad areas as community service/volunteering, collective action and political involvement for the purposes of raising and addressing public concerns, civic participation, its availability, level, magnitude and trends in various societies have been a subject of many inquiries over the recent decade.

With the view of analysing the availability, determinants and trends in civic participation, different measurement methods have been proposed and applied by various researchers and organizations. The most commonly used measures have included trust toward government, voter turnout, community interaction, measured by number of visits to the libraries, membership in civic associations, religious participation, volunteering, social trust and donating to charities.

After a careful consideration of the experience of measurement of civic participation by means of the above-mentioned proxies, the NCOC's 'Civic Health' tool has been chosen and adapted for

measuring civic participation level and trends in Armenia. The tool encompasses the following five indicator categories: (1) community service/volunteering, (2) membership in organizations, (3) accessing, exchanging and sharing information, including via ICT, (4) political and civic action, including via ICT, and (5) donating to charities and causes.

The chapter has subsequently outlined the key determinants of civic participation and identified both individual and contextual factors that typically affect the quality and magnitude of civic participation. It has been established that personal traits and attitudes, age, and resources (time, money, education, social connections, etc.) significantly influence civic participation. At the contextual level, such factors as institutions, capacity and willingness of the local self-governance bodies to collaborate with the community, community's civic capacity, cultural beliefs and traditions, the level of economic development, availability of social capital in the given locality, current 'norms of citizenship', level and quality of civic education, as well as access to ICT and its use for civic participation, are found to have a crucial effect on the level and magnitude of civic participation.

Given the importance of the concepts of social capital, civic education and ICT for civic participation and its analysis, the chapter has also provided a detailed account of the available research and its findings on the relation of those concepts with civic participation.

It has been argued that social capital, most commonly defined as resources embedded in the networks and norms that help people cooperate, share and advance their personal and communal interests, can have a significant impact on civic engagement, democratization and economic growth in a given locality. Moreover, different types of social capital have been found to advance personal and communal benefits in distinct, however, equally important ways. *Bonding* social capital – the connections to people from similar economic, cultural and social background, position and status (family, relatives, friends), have been defined as the strongest, "thick" type of social capital, and have been most typically associated with a person's survival and basic needs. While *bridging and linking* types of social capital – connections with people from different background, status, position in society and connections with 'people in power', have been described as 'weak ties' and have been found to be particularly beneficial for advancing one's personal and communal opportunities, for example, by granting access to information or knowledge outside one's immediate cycle, such as information contributing to career

advancement, new business opportunities, cooperation with various organizations, communities, etc.

Researchers have also suggested to view and examine social capital at different levels – individual, community and national. It has been discussed that availability of social capital at individual level can contribute to attainment of one's personal goals and objectives, while social capital at a community level has been found to be beneficial for collective action, civic participation and advancement of economic outcomes in the community. Trust and shared norms of social behaviour significantly reduce the transaction costs in the community and facilitate collective action aimed at achievement of the community goals, be that a solution of a common problem or creation of further opportunities for the community development. At the national level, social capital is believed to be embedded in institutions, institutionalized structures and relations, such as in political regimes, courts, etc.

While most of the conducted studies indicate that social capital contributes to democratization and economic development of the localities endowed by it, as, typically, higher levels of trust in the communities have been linked with higher levels of associational belonging and collaboration, some researchers suggest that social capital might be exceptionally a "western concept", as research findings in post-soviet contexts have showed no correlation between the level of trust and group or organizational belonging (Rossteautscher 2008). A study conducted in Armenia by Babajanian (2008), on the other hand, indicates that social capital is present in the Armenian communities, particularly its boding type, however, it has not have any effect on citizen participation, as the latter has been restricted because of poor governance, weakness of rule of law, corruption and inability or unwillingness of the local governments to involve citizens in the process of decision-making and share their power with them. It has been suggested that, in addition to the factor of institutions, lack of civic or democratic knowledge among the citizens could have been another reason behind the low level of civic participation in the post-soviet context of Armenia.

Civic education, which refers to the subjects, skills and dispositions that the citizens of a democratic country should acquire in order to be able to effectively interact with the government and other public institutions, and perform their duties and responsibilities as citizens of a democracy, has been found to have a considerable effect on civic participation. A number of studies conducted in the US and elsewhere, have demonstrated a strong link between the quality

of civic education, its curriculum and teaching methods and the level of civic engagement among the target group - most often, youth. Civic education of people living in democratic countries typically starts from their childhood –from their homes and communities, before they start learning about the basic workings and the functions of the government at school. This pattern, however, does not hold for the citizens of the newly democratic countries, where generations of people for decades had lived under totalitarian rule and did not have any democratic citizenship knowledge or skills. In these settings, civic education of not just youth, but of the whole nation becomes a critical issue that needs addressing in order for the democratic reforms to have a chance for success.

Another important determinant of civic participation, as argued in this chapter, is access to and use of Internet and communication technology (ICT), which can provide unlimited information, content, opportunities and new platforms for civic participation.

Having provided comprehensive information and analysis of the concept of civic participation, its indicators and key determinants, this chapter has outlined the framework for the study and analysis of civic participation, its forms, patterns and trends in the post-soviet context of Armenia.

# CHAPTER 3. DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK IN ARMENIA - EXPLORING THE LOCAL CONTEXT

## *3.1. Introduction*

After the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991, Armenia, one of the world's oldest civilizations, the history of which dates back to the 6th century BC[22] and is characterized by prolonged periods of loss of statehood and foreign domination throughout the Middle Ages (under Turkic, Persian and Russian rule), regained its independence and embraced the new statehood and reforms, having proclaimed itself "…*a sovereign, democratic state based on the principles of social justice and rule of law"* (RA Constitution, Article 1).

Armenia's road to democracy and free market economy, however, hasn't been a smooth and easy one. The years following the independence have been marred by a deep economic crisis, which was further exacerbated by a war (1991-1994) over ethnically Armenian Nagorno-Karabagh enclave, influx of about 300.000 refugees from Azerbaijan as a result of the conflict, closure of Armenia's borders for trade by the neighbouring Azerbaijan and Turkey, and an unprecedented out migration (Falkingham 2003; World Bank 1996; Braithwaite 1995). GDP dropped down by more than 60%, social conditions deteriorated, poverty became widespread and severe: in 1992 more than 94% of the population of Armenia were living in absolute poverty (NSS).

The newly formed government was clearly unable to deal with all those problems: mainly the humanitarian assistance and private remittances from abroad that the families were receiving from their relatives or family members who had out-migrated (different sources provide different data on the number of people who left the country to live and work abroad- the figures range from 107.000 to 1.5 million) helped the people to survive through those difficult 'early transition' times (Braithwaite 1995), labelled by the population as 'dark and cold years'.

Following Ganev's (2005) "Reversed Tillian perspective" theory, it can be suggested, that the dominant elite group that came to power in the aftermath of the fall of the soviet regime, was too busy 'extracting' the resources that have been left behind by the previous government, and the regular citizens have been largely isolated and left to themselves to cater for their survival and basic needs.

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[22] "Before Christ"

Today, after a quarter century of on-going reforms in economic, political and social sectors, after considerable reduction in the poverty rates, as well as significant economic growth that has been registered in the country, still around 32% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line (NSS).

Despite the stable economic performance and boasted double digit growth rates (11-14%) from 2001 to 2007, followed by a decrease during the financial crisis of 2008-2009, and a slow recovery from 2010 onwards (see Table 1), the Government of Armenia has not been able so far to harness the economic growth for the purposes of reduction of poverty and inequality levels, and improvement of the living standards of the overall population.

*Table 1: Real GDP Growth (%) in Armenia, 2003- 2015*

| 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 14% | 10.5% | 14.1% | 13.2% | 13.7% | 6.9% | -14.2 | 2.2% |
| **2011** | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** | 2015* (*Estimate) | | | |
| **4.7%** | **7.1%** | **3.5%** | **3.2%** | 3.5% | | | |

 *Source: IMF Economic World Outlook Database 2014*

The effects of the growth did not automatically 'trickle down', as once believed, to the wider layers of the population (Meier and Stiglitz 2001; Hall and Midgley 2004), and there is a pressing need for well-informed, coherent and effective policies and measures to improve the situation and further the processes of democratization and development that the country has embarked upon since its independence.

Yet, development and poverty reduction efforts in Armenia, including the PRSP[23] adopted in 2003 and numerous other reforms aimed at improvement of social (e.g. pension reform), private and other sectors in the country, up to date remain 'top-down', lacking an input and support from the public, and, consequently, failing to respond to the needs of the people, particularly, the disadvantaged groups of the population, and address the real problems and issues existing on the ground (UNDP Armenia 2005, Babajanian 2006, etc.).

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[23] Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

Democracy, 'good governance' and rule of law still remain ideals rather than reality. Notwithstanding the statements and provisions that have so far mostly remained on paper, Armenia's government is still 'closed' and *de facto* authoritarian: Freedom House's ranking for Armenia's government is a *'Semi-consolidated Authoritarian Regime''*, and the democracy score[24] is 5.36 (1 being the highest level of democratic progress, and 7 - the lowest) (Freedom House 2015). The country's status is 'Partly Free' according to performance against a list of indicators that Freedom House bases their judgements on.

*Table 2: Armenia country ratings by Freedom House*

(Scale from 1- 7, where 1=best; 7=worst)

|  | 1998-2004 | 2005-2008 | 2009-2012 | 2013-2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Country Status** | Partly Free | Partly Free | Partly Free | Partly Free |
| **Freedom Rating** | 4 | 4.5 | 5 | 4.5 |
| **Civil Liberties** | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| **Political Rights** | 5 | 6 | 6 | 5 |

*Source: Author's compilation from Freedom House data ([www.freedomhouse.org](www.freedomhouse.org))*

During the recent years, however, there have been some developments that, as it will be attempted to demonstrate, have contributed to a certain level of rise in civic activism in the country, partly, exogenously driven, due to the agendas for development set by the international community and the donor funded programmes and interventions that have been implemented in the country with the view of increasing citizen participation, empowering communities to engage in civic initiatives, strengthening civil society and promoting democracy and rule of law, and partly, due to the generational change and increased awareness about rights and responsibilities on part of the citizens, the driving force for which is globalization and rapidly spreading internet and communication technology that has lately become more accessible in Armenia.

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[24] Democracy score is an average of a number of indicators: Electoral Process, Civil Society, Independent Media, National Democratic Governance, Local Democratic Governance, Judicial Framework and Independence, Corruption ([www.freedomhouse.org](www.freedomhouse.org))

Increasingly, more people in the country, especially the youth in urban areas, are able to get access to information and alternative sources of media, increase their awareness, initiate and participate in civic initiatives and stand for their rights and the rights of their communities.

Over the past decade a number of CSOs (Civil Society Organizations), CBOs (Community Based Organizations)/ grassroots, associations and unions have emerged and launched activities across the country, as well as a number of civic movements and campaigns with the aim of protecting the rights of certain groups of people, addressing environmental, social and other issues have been initiated and implemented. The forms, patterns, determinants and impact of those initiatives and campaigns still remain to be researched and respective conclusions - to be drawn.

A number of recent country-wide campaigns, protests and demonstrations testify to rising civic awareness and activism in Armenia, especially among the younger, post-communist generations of citizens. These development have evoked interest and curiosity among the local and international political observers as to whether Armenia is experiencing a true 'civic awakening', or the current level of civic participation will not be sufficient to bring about significant changes, and democracy will stumble again.

During the recent years, there has also been certain progress in the use of internet by the government offices and other state agencies, which, in some cases supported by international donors, and in some cases – by separate agencies which, in an attempt to keep up the 'latest tendencies', created websites and are now in the process of increasing the use of thereof. Related advances are the availability of information, laws, legislation and other documents on the websites of public institutions (e.g. National Assembly website contains all the laws and draft laws: www.parliament.am), attempts to further promote e-governance, including by means of a specially designed e-governance website (www.e-gov.am) that provides new electronic tools (e.g. making payments, accessing databases, etc.) and increasing opportunities for involvement of citizens in public affairs, decision-making and problem-solving.

While still in embryonic form, these developments can be considered as a major milestone, which has a potential to improve the dialogue and cooperation between the state and non-state actors and contribute to more active and meaningful participation of citizens in the democracy promotion and development efforts, thereby increasing the effect and sustainability of the reforms.

The following sections will present in more detail and discuss the practice of democratic and development related transformations in Armenia, with an emphasis on the role of civic participation in those processes.

## 3.2. Democracy and Civil Society in Armenia

Re-establishing its long-lost statehood, after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia has set on the course of becoming a free, independent and democratic country, by having placed the democratic principles and values in the basis of its Constitution and laws, and having ratified all the major international documents guaranteeing human rights and freedoms, and asserting in its legislation the supremacy of the international law over the domestic one.

Armenia is a member of the United Nations (UN), Council of Europe (COE), and OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe). In close collaboration with the international community, the government has succeeded in putting in place a legal framework adequate for a democratic country; however, it has failed so far to ensure the application of those laws and principles in reality. Many local and international political observers maintain, that Armenia currently has a form, but not the content of a democratic state.

It is postulated, that the elites that were in power during the last years of the Soviet Union, used their position after the collapse of the union to 'extract' as much benefits from it as they could (evidence of chaotic and largely illegal privatization and appropriation of the former state property, which helped them to create their financial 'empires' and multiply their influence and power, giving rise to oligarchic capitalism), and attached little, if any, importance to ensuring the behavioural changes that needed to be made for a transition to democracy, including building democratic institutions, raising civic and democratic awareness among the citizens, and encouraging civic participation.

Moreover, the overlap of the economic and political interests in the country has further undermined the trust of the people in the political system and has lead to widespread disillusionment and withdrawal of public from politics (Freedom House 2012).

According to the World Values Survey (WVS) data, only 10% of the surveyed population (2010-2014 survey wave) indicated being a member of a political party, furthermore, only 2% of those belonging to a political party identified as being actively involved in it (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Active/Inactive Member: Political Party Membership in Armenia*
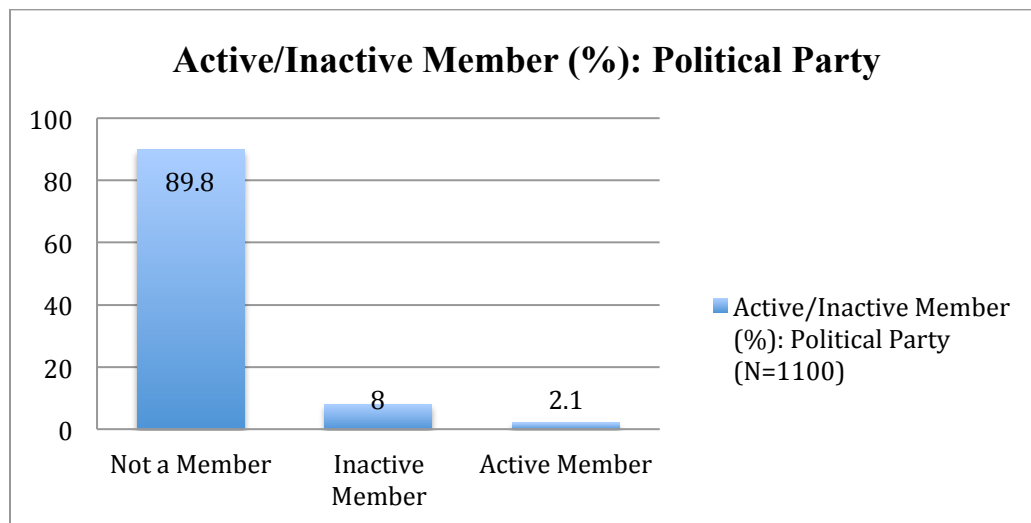


*Source: World Value Survey (WVS) Data for 2010-2014*

As to the confidence in political parties, the WVS data indicate that more than 35% of the respondents did not trust political parties at all, and 37% indicated not trusting the political parties very much. (Please, see Table 3).

*Table 3: Confidence in Political Parties in Armenia (World Survey Data, 2011)*

| Confidence: Political Parties | |
| --- | --- |
| | **%/Total** |
| A great deal | 2 |
| Quite a lot | 20.5 |
| Not very much | 37.2 |
| None at all | 35.8 |
| Don´t know | 4.4 |
| **(N)** | **1100** |

*Democratic Governance*

After its independence, Armenia adopted a semi-presidential system of governance (RA Constitution, 1995), with extensive authority granted to the President of the Republic over the separated into legislative, executive and judicial branches of power. The amendments to the

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Constitution, introduced by referendum in 2005, somewhat limited the power of the President and enhanced that of the legislative branch – the RA National Assembly (NA) - a unicameral Parliament, elected for a 5-year term and comprised of 131 members, 41 of whom are directly elected from constituencies, and 90 – from party lists, by proportional representation.

The President is elected by the popular vote for a 5-year term, renewable once. The incumbent (Serzh Sargsyan) is currently serving his second term (elected in February 2008, and re-elected in February 2013).

On December 6, 2015, a Constitutional Referendum pushed by the President and his party (Republican Party of Armenia (RPA)) took place, where the population voted on transforming the current semi-presidential system into a parliamentary one. The constitutional referendum has been seen by the population as a move to strengthen the position of the incumbent President, ensuring for him either the position of Prime Minister or the head of the ruling party in the Parliament, after the end of his 2nd term of presidency. The preliminary results of the Referendum indicated that around 66% of the voters gave a positive answer, however, in the light of the reported pressures, gross violations, ballot stuffing, fraud and other unlawful practices (e.g. BBC, December 2015; CF 2015, etc.), the legitimacy of the Referendum results is currently under question, being disputed by the opposition and the CSOs that have been monitoring the elections.

Lack of real checks and balances is recognized as the key governance challenge in Armenia by many observers and organizations, including USAID[25]. Other challenges include lack of rule of law, and lack of citizen involvement and input in legislative and policy formation processes (ibid.).

According to the Freedom House, Armenia's democratic governance score is 5.57 (1-representing the highest level of democratic governance, and 7 - the lowest).

*Elections*

Since Armenia's independence, several elections have been held in the country, including 6 Presidential elections, 4 National Assembly elections, and 3 referendums. The RA Electoral Code envisages universal, equal and direct suffrage for the President, Deputies of the National

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[25] www.usaid.gov/armenia/ (accessed on November 6, 2015)

Assembly and the Local self-government bodies. The average voter turnout in the elections has been 61%[26].

Over the recent decades, Armenia has collaborated with several international organizations, including Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Council of Europe (COE), Transparency International and others, to bring its electoral legal framework in correspondence with the international norms and improve the electoral processes in the country.

Although the façade of free, universal and equal elections has been put in place, the history of elections in Armenia has demonstrated, that the *institution of elections* cannot be considered as established yet. All the recent Presidential and Parliamentary elections, as well as the elections of the local self-government bodies, have been marred by violations, fraud, use of administrative resources for election campaigns, ballot-stuffing, widespread vote buying and pressure (Amnesty International, May 23, 2013, etc.) exercised by the ruling party on the voters and observers.

The recent elections (Referendum on December 6, 2015) have once again confirmed that these practices have not changed, and there is no will on the part of the government to improve and further democratize the process of elections. Among others, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Citizen Observer Initiative (COI) and European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE) have criticized the election process, stressing the misuse of administrative resources to campaign in favour of the constitutional changes and control of the electoral administration on the territorial and local levels. Inaccuracy of the voter lists, which leaves room for further manipulation, was named as another critical issue.

A paragraph from the joint statement issued for COI and EPDE read:

> *"In several cases, citizen observers and international media representatives were intimidated and hindered in carrying out their monitoring activities. In some polling stations the counting process was interrupted due to obstacles allegedly initiated by PEC (Precinct election committee) members".* (The Armenian Weekly, December 7, 2015).

Many videos, illustrating the violations of citizens' rights have been posted on social media sites (YouTube, Facebook, etc.) and reports of the citizens, who found at the polling stations that somebody had already voted in their name, or somebody had voted for their family members who

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[26] http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/12/ (accessed on September 4, 2015)

were away or permanently lived abroad, were published and widely circulated, putting the legitimacy of these elections under question.

These and other unlawful practices, manipulating the expression of people's free will and choice, as well as selective application of law, have only further undermined the population's trust in the system of elections in the country.

The Freedom House score (2015) for 'Armenian Electoral Process' is 5. 75 (1= best, 7= worst).

*Local Self-Government*

The foundations of local self-government in Armenia are laid in the RA Constitution (adopted in 1995). In 1996, the RA Law on Local Self-Government was adopted, which introduced a new system of administrative-territorial divisions in the country - the capital Yerevan, having a regional status and comprised of 12 communities, 10 marzes (regions) with their marz centres and regional government units (marzptetarans), and 926 communities: 48 urban and 865 rural.

Affirming the commitment to further strengthen democracy, promote decentralization of power and ensure the right of the citizens to participate in governance at the local level, in 2002, Armenia ratified the European Charter on Local Self-Government, granting the communities the right and responsibility to resolve their own issues within the framework of the RA Constitution and the RA Law on Local Self-Government.

Local self-government in Armenia is carried out by the heads of the communities – Mayors, and the Community Councils (aldermen), who are elected by the community by direct suffrage for a 4-year period of time. The number of the Community Council members varies, based on the community's population size, between 5 and 15.

The RA Law on Budget System (1997) regulates the community's financial resources and stipulates the procedures of forming, implementing and controlling the community budget. According to the RA legal framework, the core of the community budget is made up of the payments of the property and land tax, as well as duties, and payment for municipal services, alongside with certain limited subsidies (transfers) from the state budget, which are regulated by the RA Law on Financial Equalization (1998).

The local self-government bodies in Armenia are required to draw up a four-year community development plan and work together with the citizens to meet the planned objectives.

The practice of local self-government in Armenia, however, as the available research demonstrates (e.g. USAID/Counterpart International 2012), differs significantly from the prescriptions of the law: most of the community leaders lack the skills and expertise for formulation of effective development plans and strategies; the institution of the Community Council is not well-established yet – with unresolved issues are gaps starting from the Community Council member elections (no criteria for candidate's skills, experience, or time to be dedicated for performing Community Council membership duties, which are on voluntary basis etc.), to lack of accountability and transparency regarding the implemented work; lack of communities' financial independence and adequate resources for addressing their problems; low level of citizen participation and input in the local self-government.

With the view of optimizing the system of local self-government in Armenia and addressing the critical issues impeding the development of communities – small population size of many communities, limited financial resources of communities and their weak capacity, in 2011, a concept paper was drawn, proposing merging small communities with larger ones, based on their territorial proximity. The reform package named 'Community enlargement' (also referred to as community consolidation or community merger) has been presented and discussed within the Ministry of Territorial Administration, with the population and local mass media, as well as with a number of international organizations, including GIZ and the Council of Europe (www.mta.am). Within the package, it has been proposed to choose a Center for each enlarged community that will have a central location among the settlements and will have more than 3000 residents and some basic infrastructure to provide public transportation services from and to the other settlements within the enlarged community. It is envisaged that the merged communities will represent one administrative and territorial unit, will have joint local authorities (a Mayor and a joint Community Council, composed of one member from each settlement), consolidated community budget and resources, as well as integrated property. In the situation where the actual population of many communities is only 30-50 or 100 residents, and the state subsidies, due to the absence of other sources of funding of the community budget, are directed mainly to the maintenance of the local administration and its staff, this reform seems to be a reasonable response to the problems the small communities face today.

The process of community enlargement started in 2015, with proposed 3 pilot mergers – in Tavush (Dilijan and nearby villages), Lori (Tumanyan and nearby villages) and Syunik (Tatev

and nearby villages) marzes. Local referenda on the pilot merger have been held on May 17, 2015. Their results, however, demonstrated that the population of the villages was not convinced of the advantages of the merger. Further discussion and debates on the subject continued over the course of the following months, and the pilot merger eventually took place in February 2016. Elections of local self-government bodies have been held for the communities of Dilijan, Tumanyan and Tatev on February 14. As a result of the implementation of the pilot stage of the Community enlargement in Armenia, there are now 3 merged or enlarged communities instead of the previously 22. The reform is still underway, with new mergers planned during 2016-2017.

Overall, the current system of local self-government in Armenia is considered by local and international observers, as well as many international organizations, as weak and inadequately developed, in particular lacking in the areas of good governance, including transparency, accountability and citizen participation (USAID/Counterpart International 2012; GIZ, Armenia 2014).

The Freedom House's (2015) score for Armenia's Local Democratic Governance is 5.75 (1=best, 7=worst).

*Political Parties*

The RA Constitution provides for a multiparty democratic system, where parties can be freely formed, as a vehicle for expression of people's political will. After independence, more than 120 political parties have been formed and registered with the Ministry of Justice in Armenia (NSS). The RA Law on Political Parties, adopted in 2002, regulates the establishment, registration and workings of the political parties. According to the law, a party should have a minimum of 200 members and representations in at least one third of regions of the country. Members should be at least 18 years of age; membership in political parties is voluntary.

Despite the multi-party system, which envisages plurality and creation of coalitions for government, so that no single party can hold all the power alone, in reality, the ruling Republican party of Armenia (RPA, "HHK" in Armenian) has been dominating both the legislative and executive branches of power for the last 15 years, and it is likely to strengthen its grip on the power after the country's transition to the parliamentary system of governance.

Over these years, there have been a few instances when RPA entered into a dialogue with opposition and formed coalitions (most recent case- in 2011), however, none of them lasted,

ending in the withdrawal of the opposition parties from the coalition because of certain disagreements regarding the course of foreign or domestic policy.

The following is a brief overview of the 6 major political parties that have been elected to the RA National Assembly following the last Parliamentary elections in 2012:

*Republican Party of Armenia* (RPA) –"HHK": Chairman - Serzh Sargsyan (The RA President)
Website: http://hhk.am
The party was established in 1990. Being the ruling party in Armenia, it currently holds the majority of seats in the Parliament - 69 (44.1%), and controls most of the government bodies in the country. The party's ideology is nationalist conservative. In the foreign policy realm, the party claims to be balancing Russian, European and US interests in Armenia. It has been advancing the strategic alliance with Russia, at the same time, declaring its commitment to EU agenda and progressing the political association and economic integration with the European Union, within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) framework.

In the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, RPA's position is to support the right of self-determination of the NK people, and resolution of the issue by means of peaceful negotiations, based on the package of the Madrid principles, proposed by the OSCE led "Minsk-Group". As to the relations with Turkey, RPA's position has been rapprochement with the vision of opening the borders and establishing diplomatic relations, which resulted in the so-called 'Football Diplomacy" (President Sargsyan invited then Turkey's President Abdullah Gul to a Turkey-Armenia football match in Yerevan in 2008) and signature of Armenian-Turkish Protocols in 2009, which, however, were subsequently withdrawn from the Parliament, as a result of intense internal pressure against them in both countries.

Social and economic goals of RPA stress reforms and incorporation of European norms and standards in the country's legislation, as well as increasing efficiency of the market by boosting export and improving investment climate.

*Prosperous Armenia Party* (PAP, "BHK" or "Bargavach Hayastan"): Chairman – Naira Zohrabyan
Website: www.bhk.am
PAP was founded in 2004 by a billionaire businessman Gagik Tsarukyan, owner of 'Multi-Group" Concern, who was the party's chairman till February 2015. After a public standoff with

the RA President, when, following PAP's anti-government protest, allegedly triggered by abduction of a PAP activist (hetq.am February 13, 2015), the President publicly denounced Tsarukyan's incompetence in politics and ordered inspection of his businesses, the latter sought reconciliation and announced about his resignation from politics and PAP.

PAP holds 37 seats (30.2%) in the Parliament. It is a central right-wing party, currently trying to rebrand itself as opposition.

The party has been repeatedly criticized by local and international observers as lacking ideology and representing mainly a platform for its founder Tsarukyan.

PAP's foreign policy agenda has mostly been complementarity – promotion of good relations with all the global players, and support to the Government's policies in the issues of NK and Armenia-Turkey relations. As their economic and social agenda, PAP claims to support economic liberalism by advocating limited role of the government in the market, increasing jobs by promotion of SME development in the country, and ensuring social protection for the vulnerable groups of the population.

*Armenian National Congress* (ANK, "Hay Azgayin Congres"): Chairman – Levon Ter-Petrosyan
Website: www.anc.am

ANC was founded in 2008, as a coalition of 13 opposition parties, led by the former RA President Ter-Petrosyan. ANC holds 7 seats (7.1%) in the Parliament.

In 2008, ANC challenged the results of the Presidential elections, refusing to accept the legitimacy of the latter on the grounds of multiple violations of the electoral law, and criticized the government for disproportionate use of administrative resources in dispersing the street protests, which resulted in death of 10 people on March 1, 2008.

The party has a liberal-democratic orientation, it claims to be committed to restoring constitutional order, replacing the 'kleptocratic' regime by a legitimately elected one, establishing/strengthening the system of checks of balances, establishing a democratic electoral system and restoring free market relations.

*Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsutyun* (ARF-D, "HHD"): Chairman- Hrant Markarian
Website: www.arfd.info

ARF is one of Armenia's oldest socialist parties. It was founded in 1890. Currently it holds 6 seats (5.7%) in the Parliament.

ARF's ideology is based on social justice, democracy and national self-determination. The party had an instrumental role in Armenia's first Republic in 1918-1920, and was subsequently exiled by the Bolsheviks in 1921, when Armenia became a part of Soviet Union. ARF has the largest representation in the Armenian Diaspora. The party supports a balanced foreign policy with Russia, EU and USA. It backs the EU integration, advocates for introduction of stronger anti-corruption measures and a stronger social component in the economic policies. ARF was against the ratification of Armenian-Turkish protocols in 2009, believing that reconciliation was possible only after Turkey's acceptance of its past and recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

*"Rule of Law Party" (RLP, "Orinats Erkir" ("OEK")*: Chairman- Artur Baghdasaryan
Website: www.oek.am
RLP was founded by Artur Baghdasaryan, in 1997. It holds 6 seats (5.5%) in the Parliament. RLP has been in and out of coalitions with the ruling party for many times since then, with the party's leader serving as the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Secretary of the Armenian National Security Council, and resigning from both posts after disagreements with the ruling party. RLP's ideology is conservative, pro-European, and at the same time not anti-Russian. Its foreign policy agenda mostly coincides with that of the ruling party – RLP backs the latter's position on Turkey relations and Nagorno-Karabakh. The party declares establishment/strengthening of rule of law, good governance and transparency as its main priorities, and advocates for market reforms within the framework of the European Eastern Partnership.

*Heritage Party ("Zharangutyun")*: Chairman- Raffi Hovhannisian
Website: www.heritage.am
"Heritage Party" was founded in 2002, by a US-born Diaspora Armenian Rafii Hovhannisian, a US -educated (Fletcher and Georgetown) political scientist, who moved back to Armenia in 1988, to establish and oversee a post-earthquake reconstruction programme, funded by the Armenian Association of America. "Heritage" holds 5 seats (5.8%) in the Parliament.
The party is advocating for deeper EU integration and stronger bilateral relations with the EU countries, as well as making Armenia's membership in EU a key pillar of the country's domestic and foreign policy. Social and economic agenda of the "Heritage" focuses around social equality, free market and transparency. As to Armenia-Turkey relations, "Heritage" was against the

rapprochement protocols of 2009, calling for more comprehensive solutions to the problem, including the acknowledgement of the Genocide and its legacy. As regards the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the party advocated for recognition of NK's independence by Armenia.

In general, evaluation of political parties in Armenia by local and international organizations and observers indicate lack of capacity, clear and grounded ideological and political platforms, as well as lack of engaged and active supporters as a result of disconnectedness of party leadership from average citizens.

A common criticism of the political parties in Armenia is their feature of being based on personalities, their vision and ambitions, rather than on distinct ideological ideas and agendas (e.g. USAID/Armenia 2005; EPRS 2015).

The two leading parties in Armenia – RPA and PAP are often characterized as 'catch-all' parties, composed by the elite members, owners of big or medium businesses, with no clearly defined ideology.

While many observers note that there is no viable opposition in Armenia, and describe it as 'weak and personality-driven' (Freedom House 2015), among the parties that identify themselves as opposition, ANC and "Heritage" are usually characterized as more radical than ARF and RLP, as the latter often support the ruling party's policies and choices, provided the latter are in their interest or might advance their position.

Another factor compromising the capacity of the political parties in Armenia is suggested to be their Soviet-style, top-down and hierarchic structure, where the leadership dictates the political agenda and directions to the followers and junior party members, with little or no room for discussion and debate on the party's position and course (USAID/Armenia 2005).

Assessment of the political parties reveals that there are numerous challenges for creation of a pluralistic, democratic and competitive political context in Armenia. The prevailing autocratic mentality and practices, absence of real checks and balances on the government, as well as dependent and biased judiciary and deeply embedded corruption are some other major barriers (ibid.).

Despite the adequate legal framework, providing for a pluralistic democratic political system and an even field for competition, there are no enforcement mechanisms, and the competition largely remains uneven for the parties declaring themselves as pro-government or opposition, as the latter

face serious barriers for their operation, fund-raising and gaining access to media, especially television, because of the close links and relationship of the ruling party and all the big businesses in the country (ibid.).

As the existing political environment indicates, the quantity of the political parties formed after Armenia's independence, did not result in significant qualitative changes in the political spectrum and its capacity to support the country's democratization and economic/social development reforms.

*Foreign Policy Influence on Democratization*

In 1999, Armenia signed the EU-Armenian Partnership Cooperation Agreement, reaffirming its commitment to political association and economic integration with the European Union.

In 2004, Armenia was included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and in 2009 - in Eastern Partnership. In 2013, Armenia was expected to sign an Association Agreement (AA) regarding Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA), however it announced about withdrawing from it, and joining the Russia-led Eurasian Customs Union instead.

On January 2, 2015, in a controversial move, the President Sargsyan signed the agreement for Armenia to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Armenia has been long balancing Russian, EU and USA interest in the country and the region.

Security concerns, stemming from the unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan and closed borders with the two neighbouring countries (Turkey and Azerbaijan), have seriously hampered the economic progress in Armenia and further promoted Russia's role as Armenia's strategic partner in the region.

For decades, Russia has been viewed as an important ally and the main guarantor of peace in Armenia. Russian military base (N102) has been deployed in Armenia, near the city of Gyumri since 1995, as a part of the CIS[27] air defence system, and has been given the authority to guard Armenia's frontier with Turkey and Iran. Strained relations and absence of diplomatic ties with Turkey over the denial of the Armenian Genocide (mass killings and deportation of Armenians in 1915-1921, when more than 1.5 million Armenians perished, is recognized as genocide by the overwhelming majority of historians, organizations and more than 30 countries worldwide), and

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[27] Commonwealth of Independent States

Azerbaijan's increasingly military rhetoric and threats, as well as increased military spending, alongside with constant violation of cease-fire regime and regular skirmishes across the borderline, have significantly escalated the existing tension and fear of the conflict among the population and have contributed to strengthening the pro-Russian attitudes and Russia's influence in the country.

Close economic and political ties of the ruling party leaders with Russia have been another factor in the development of friendly relations and strategic alliance between the two countries. Russia has had a strong presence in the Armenian economy since the latter's independence in 1991. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia forgave Armenia's post-soviet debt of USD $98 million, in exchange Armenia passed to Russia 5 formerly state-owned military-industrial enterprises and signed a 10-year economic cooperation agreement with Russia (Migdalovitz 2004). In the following years, Russia purchased large shares in such strategic sectors as telecommunications, energy and banking (Babayan 2015, RFE/RL 2012), thereby having strengthened its influence on the Armenian economy and politics.

Despite the close economic ties and dependence of Armenia's foreign policy on Russia, in the recent years, Russia's popularity and pro-Russian sentiments in Armenia started to fade, especially among the youth, who started to notice that Russia's backslide into autocracy under Putin's rule was affecting also Armenia and hindering its further association with EU. By the pro-Western youth and organizations, Russia started to be seen as an actor, whose geo-political interests in the region were obstructing further democratization and even reversing the achieved progress. For its negative influence on democratization efforts in Armenia and the overall region, Russia was dubbed as a 'democracy blocker' (Babayan 2015).

In her analysis of the EU's and USA's democracy promotion efforts and their different outcomes in the three South Caucasian countries – Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, Babayan (2015) stresses the 'democracy blocking' or obstructing role of Russia, which, aiming to preserve its influence in the region, uses two basic *modi operandi* in building its relations with the former soviet countries – *business-energy* and *politics-security* (Babayan 2013). Depending on the need for Russia's economic or military resources, the countries in the region have exhibited different level of compliance with its requirements. While Georgia has largely resisted Russia's influence and has achieved relatively more progress in terms of democratization (classified by Freedom House (2015) as a Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime), and Azerbaijan, being oil-rich

and energy-wise independent from Russia, has taken a rather neutral stance to the latter, with its government, nevertheless, strengthening its authoritarian grip over the recent years (classified by Freedom House (2015) as a Consolidated Authoritarian Regime), Armenia, being completely dependent on Russia for natural resources (gas, oil) and security purposes, has been Russia's Number 1 ally in the region and has been compelled to follow Moscow's 'guidance' or 'advice' on nearly all major decisions (Babayan 2015). Russia's strong grip and influence on Armenia have undoubtedly contributed to the democratic stalling in the country (ibid.).

The anti-Russian sentiments in Armenia further grew with the refusal of the RA President to sign the Agreement Association with the EU, and joining the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union instead, citing security reasons because of the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (Freedom House 2015) behind the decision, as well as after the murder of an Armenian family of 7 in the city of Gyumri by a Russian serviceman Permyakov, who was subsequently arrested and passed into the jurisdiction of the Russian Military base for trial, instead of being tried under the Armenian jurisdiction, as the existing agreement between Russia and Armenia stipulated.

Rising anti-Russian attitudes in the country were further fuelled by the decision of the Russian-owned Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA) to hike the electricity price in the country by more than 17%. Following these events, a number of civic campaigns and protests erupted in the country: the youth demonstrated against Armenia's accession into the Russia-led Eastern European Union, (EEU) (RFE/RL November 26, 2013; Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 16, 2015; The Guardian, January 15, 2015, etc.), demonstrated in Yerevan and Gyumri against the inadequate response of the government to the decision of the Russian authorities not to pass the murder suspect Permyakov under the Armenian jurisdiction (Euronews, January 15, 2015, etc.), as well as country-wide demonstrations took place ("No to Plunder" or "Electric Yerevan" civic initiative), demanding reconsideration of the electricity price hike and investigation of the financial reports of the ENA on the grounds of mismanagement and embezzlement of funds (a more detailed account of this civic initiative is provided in Chapter 4).

Continuing close collaboration with Russia and the membership in the Eastern European Union (EEU), which, according to some observers, has not yielded any economic benefits for the country so far (IWPR, September 24, 2015), Armenia, has also restarted its negotiations and cooperation with EEU, and is currently working on a new agreement to resume its political and

economic association in the areas that are compatible with its membership obligations under the EEU (http://eeas.europa.eu[28]).

*Freedom of Press and Information*

Following Armenia's proclamation of independence in 1991, the RA Government signed the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and based on the document, developed the RA Law on Press and Mass Media (adopted in 1991), which guaranteed access to information, freedom of speech and independent press. The same principles have been enshrined and guaranteed by the RA Constitution (1995). In 2003, after becoming a member of the Council of Europe in 2001, Armenia enacted legislation on Freedom of Information, guaranteeing the right to request and receive information from 'information holder' (state bodies, local self-governance bodies, state budget funded organizations, etc.), as specified within the framework of the RA Law on Freedom of Information.

Availability of free and unrestricted information and alternative media channels for receiving information helps citizens to get more balanced and comprehensive views of the events and news, and consequently, make better informed decision and choices, and more actively participate in the public affairs, all of which are critical for democracy.

According to the State Registry data, there are 747 newspapers and 328 magazines publishing in Armenia. However, most of the printed media appears to be funded either by the government/ the ruling party or the opposition. Some are also funded by businesses, making them serve the interests and agendas of their owners. According to Freedom House data, most newspapers in Armenia are privately owned, but very few, if not none at all, are independent from the government or business interests.

Newspaper readership in Armenia is rather low, which, respectively, determines the low circulation of printed media, mainly concentrating in the capital Yerevan and a few larger cities. According to various estimates, only 5-10% of the population consume news from printed media. According to a study of media landscape in Armenia (Pearce 2011), two-thirds of the population do not read newspapers at all. Among those who read, only 6% buy a newspaper daily.

Low circulation, together with a weak advertising market, make private ownership of printed media unprofitable and, therefore, not sustainable without a sponsor, which, in its turn, affects the

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[28] http://eeas.europa.eu/armenia/index_en.htm (accessed on September 12, 2015)

independence of the press, as the latter inevitably reflects the funder's expectations and agenda. Most of the newspapers in Armenia are described as small enterprises, built around the personality of its editor, with 2-3 staff members, who receive assignments from the editor and prepare the needed material (Pearce 2011).

Most popular daily newspapers in Armenia are Hayastani Hanrapetutyun (Republic of Armenia), Aravot (Morning), Haykakan Zhamanak (Armenian Times) and Iravunk (Rights). Average daily circulation is said to be from 1.500 to 3.000 copies. Hayastani Hanrapetutyun is the government's official newspaper, whereas Aravot and Haykakan Zhamanak represent opposition.

In Armenia, radio is more popular as a source of entertainment and listening to music, rather than receiving news and information. Mainly Radio Liberty that transmits news three times a day has been mentioned as a source of news, especially for the people who own radio in their cars. Over 76% of the respondents in the study conducted by Pearce (2011) noted that they had not listened to radio at all during the previous year.

The most popular information source in Armenia is by far television. About 87% of the population report watching TV on daily basis (Pearce 2011). Five TV stations are available nationwide, another 7 TV stations – in the capital Yerevan and its surroundings, and 1-2 TV stations - in the regional centres. Nearly 97% of the households have access to H1, H2, Armenia TV and Shant TV channels. Russian channel RTR Planeta is also accessible nationwide. It is estimated that nearly all the Armenian households own a TV set, and 89% of the people watch TV, particularly, the news, during the prime time slot: from 19:00 – 22:00 (ibid.). It is worth noting, that despite the overwhelming popularity of TV as a source of news and information, only 36% of the respondents of the survey, conducted by Pearce (2011), believed that TV was independent, while more than 55% - believed that TV news coverage was dependent on the government and its agenda. The World Value Survey data for Armenia's confidence in television confirm these numbers, indicating that about 50% of the respondents have 'not much' confidence in television, and 22% - 'have no' confidence in television at all.

Freedom House indicates that the Armenian government maintains tight control over the state-owned Armenian Public Television and all the private channels, which are owned by the businessmen loyal to the president (Freedom House, 2006).

Armenia's broadcasting licensing and registration framework has been named as the main obstacle for media plurality in the country and has been criticized by local and international organizations alike (OSCE/Yerevan 2011[29]; Freedom House 2015).

Another important obstacle in the development of free media is considered to be self-censorship – political pressure, harassment, intimidation and violence against journalists have been quite frequent, particularly after the protests and demonstrations in 2013. In a number of reported cases, media representatives and journalists have been detained, physically attacked, and their equipment has been destroyed or confiscated (Freedom House 2015).

Unlike television, Internet is considered to be relatively free and independent in Armenia. Over the recent years ICT has become a major source of news and information in the country. According to Freedom House data, Internet penetration reached almost 50% in 2015, and the quality, speed and stability of Internet infrastructure have considerably improved, allowing more and more people to get information and news from a variety of online newspapers and other sources. The government has so far generally refrained from blocking or banning any online content, including political, and neither the government nor the Public Service Regulatory Committee (PSRC) that controls the telecommunication in the country, impose any restrictions or conditions on Internet providers (ibid.). Internet users in Armenia have so far enjoyed unlimited content and online resources, including political and social content, blogs, forums, voice and instant messaging.

There are about 35-40 online newspapers, many offering the content also in Russian and in English. Freedom House indicates that by 2011, more than 400 local online newspaper websites were created in Armenia (FH 2012). Compared to printed media, posting the content online requires significantly less resources from the newspaper owners. Most local newspapers and magazines provide their entire online content free of charge.

In addition to growing in popularity, online media has been increasingly recognized as independent and more pluralistic than the traditional media (ibid).

Freedom House data indicate, that in 2014, the TV viewership dropped to 79%, while 17% of the population started consuming primarily online content. Internet consumption is especially high

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[29] Conference on Mass Media in Armenia, Speech Notes available at
http://www.osce.org/yerevan/75165?download=true (Accessed September 2015)

among the youth – it is estimated that 90% of the young people under 20, and 80% - aged 21-30, regularly access online content (FH 2015). The most frequent online activity has been found to be social networking (Pearce, 2011, Freedom House 2015). Facebook usage doubled in a year in the country, reaching 640.000 active users in 2014. (ibid.)

While lack of professional journalists and, subsequently, well-prepared and balanced material, as well as low quality of television programmes have been mentioned as common concerns among the population, online content users have been generally reported to be more satisfied by the quality of the material (ibid.), as it is likely that given the variety of the available platforms, they were able to find those matching their taste and interests.

According to Freedom House (2015), Internet status is "Free" in Armenia, and the Internet score is 28 (1=best, 100=worst).

The general score for Press Freedom in Armenia is 61 (on the scale from 1- 100; 1=best, 100-worst), and the Press Status is "Not Free" (FH 2015).

*E-government*

As mentioned earlier, over the recent decade, Internet and communication technologies (ICT) have become increasingly accessible and widespread in Armenia – currently, more than 50% of the population has a regular access to Internet (FH 2015, Internet in the World Statistics[30], etc.). Internet penetration is considerably higher in the capital and larger cities, compared to the villages; so is computer literacy.

In parallel with Internet diffusion and penetration in the country, online access to government agencies and structures has been gradually improving.

More and more public agencies, especially those at the national and regional levels, created websites to establish online representation and provide basic information on their activities, programs, as well as some tools for citizen interaction.

Several websites have been created specifically in an attempt to develop and promote *e-government* in the country. The website www.e-gov.am (https://www.e-gov.am/en) has been launched to provide a one-stop access to the electronic tools (such as registration of an organization or a business online, sending an online (not official) letter to the government,

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[30] http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm#asia

making electronic payments, obtaining an online entry visa, etc.), and public agency databases, allowing online access to decrees, protocols, government session agendas, laws, and other useful for citizens information. The website also publishes information on the state budget expenditures.

In the framework of e-government promotion, payment of taxes and other duties, as well as payments of bills and traffic fines can now be made online.

Websites of most of the national, regional and local self-government bodies have been created, with basic information on the structures, programs, budgets, and other information deemed essential for citizens.

Increasingly, more and more people started searching for needed information online and visiting the websites of the state agencies with hope to resolve their problems, or find the necessary forms or documents online.

Expansion of ICT and e-governance possibilities can significantly contribute to saving citizens' time and money, that would be needed for visiting those agencies, as well as helping reduce red-tape and corruption/bribery risks.

The study of the online representation of the Armenian public agencies, however, reveals that not all the websites provide up-to-date information or interactive tools/mechanisms that allow a dialogue or feedback from the citizens.

While the national and regional level government bodies have up-to-date and functional websites that provide basic information on the workings and functions of those structures, as well as allow a certain level of interaction, the situation with community level representation is lacking, especially in the case of smaller towns and villages.

Among the well functioning and regularly updated websites are those of the RA President (www.president.am), the Government (www.gov.am), with links to the pages of all the Ministries, the Judiciary (www.court.am), and the National Assembly (NA) (www.parliament.am). All of those websites provide general information on the structure, committees, groups, activities and news related to those organizations. A notable progress is the provision of an online access to the RA legislation - all the Laws, amendments, draft laws and regulations can now be accessed online.

The regional level government websites are in a poorer shape, compared to the national ones. In comparison, they provide rather limited information and do not seem to be regularly updated, nor

provide the latest news and information on the activities of the regional administration offices. However, they provide vital statistics regarding the region, as well as the economic and social snapshots of the region with its communities.

As regards the municipal level, the city of Yerevan has an up-to-date website, with comprehensive information about the city, the legal acts, programs, as well as the citizen reception hours. The website also provides a possibility of a feedback, and tracing an official letter or request filed to the Municipality.

While most of the national and regional level websites, as well those of the capital Yerevan and a few larger cities (e.g. Gyumri, Vanadzor, Dilijan, etc.) provide a possibility of a 'feedback' –a small message tool through which an inquiry or complaint can be sent to the agency, it is clearly specified, that those messages are not considered as 'official' letters or applications/requests, which should be still sent via regular post or submitted to the agencies in person. On the websites, however, citizens can track their 'official letters' by the reference number and see which department and officials are they being dealt with. The websites do not provide emails of any officials. Thus, an online interaction mechanism in reality is still rather limited, if not missing.

The situation with online representation varies greatly for the local governments and local agencies; even though most of the larger cities and villages have websites, the analysis of the latter shows that they are rather oriented towards tourists and not as much towards active citizenry, as they do not provide tools for citizens to raise and discuss proposals and ideas online, or to communicate with the local authorities. Most of those websites provide vital statistics related to the city/village, its climatic conditions, information on the history of the community, monuments and museums, as well as information on the places of interest in the city or village.

While the currently existing e-government possibilities in Armenia are a huge step forward from the situation a few years earlier and can be qualified as a major progress in the direction of fostering democracy and development in Armenia, as interested citizens now can access and get a substantial body of information online, it is suggested that e-government promotion efforts should be further continued and the electronic possibilities - improved and expanded.

The development of e-governance is also considered as an important step in the fight against corruption in Armenia (Freedom House 2015), as well as an effective measure of increasing the responsiveness of the national, regional and local government to the citizens and their needs.

*Relations with and Role of Armenian Diaspora*

Armenia has a large Diaspora, a few times exceeding its population's size within the country, spread all over the world, with largest communities in Russia, USA, France and Lebanon. The Armenian Diaspora has had a particularly critical role in the economic development of the country. From 1991 onwards, numerous Armenian organizations, businessmen and philanthropists from all over the world have provided much needed aid and assistance to Armenia through various relief funds, charitable organizations and projects, helping the country to cope with the consequences of the devastating earthquake of 1988 and those of the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh liberation) war (1998-1994); donating to socially disadvantaged families, orphans; investing in infrastructure building, school and kindergarten construction and/or repair, as well as in development of the civil society's, mass media's and other sectors' capacities, and otherwise contributing to the economic revival of their motherland. Among the most notable investors and philanthropists are the Fresno born American Armenian businessmen Kirk Kerkorian, the founder of Lincy foundation (https://www.unlv.edu/lincyinstitute/foundation) through which he financed more than USD $300 million[31] worth infrastructure projects in Armenia and donated millions for restoration of Armenian museums, theatres, concert halls, schools and highways, the famous French-Armenian singer and songwriter Charles Aznavour, who has raised funds and donated extensively for earthquake relief and reconstruction, to a variety of charities, school building and other humanitarian projects; Ruben Vardanyan, a Russian Armenian businessmen and philanthropist, co-founder of the United World College Dilijan (UWC Dilijan) (http://www.uwcdilijan.org/), 100 LIVES project and Aurora Prize (https://auroraprize.com/en/), and the co-founder Noubar Afeyan – an American Armenian entrepreneur, venture capitalist, inventor and technologist, and many other accomplished Armenians living in the USA, Russia, France, Canada and elsewhere in the world and wishing to make their contribution to the development of their ancestral home. Armenian Diaspora has been viewed as the country's comparative advantage and an important asset for the economy.

To formalize and promote the relations with Diaspora, in 2009, the RA Government created the Ministry of Diaspora, which has been since coordinating and organizing various activities and

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/393614/Armenia_II_rev_1.doc. (accessed January 18, 2016)

projects, soliciting and coordinating investment and helping the Diaspora Armenians to reconnect with their homeland, visit, socialize, integrate, learn culture and traditions (www.mindiaspora.am).

Although it is traditionally believed that Armenian Diaspora has been largely disengaged from politics, which is particularly true about the Armenian Diaspora in Russia, Diaspora in the USA on the contrary, has been quite actively involved in certain political issues, for instance, by organized lobbying for recognition of the Armenian Genocide (e.g. awareness-raising and campaign for the recognition of the Genocide by Serzh Tankian and John Dolmayan of the Grammy-Award winning band 'System of a Down', etc.) and vocally opposing the attempted Turkey – Armenian rapprochement. During the recent years, Diaspora's involvement in politics has been extended to various civic campaigns, initiatives and social movements in Armenia, both by through *physical participation* and support to those initiatives (e.g. campaigns " I will not pay 150 drams", "Electric Yerevan", etc.) and active *online participation* in various groups, forums and discussions, supporting the campaigns and initiatives directed to the fight with corruption and impunity of the high level officials in Armenia.

It is noteworthy that while during the first decades of independence, much of the Diaspora's assistance was directed to aid and charitable organizations in Armenia, later, Diaspora's involvement has significantly increased in the spheres of education, science and research. There has been an increased realization of the need to move from hand-outs and aid to building the *capacity* of the local population to solve their own problems. Many Western style educational establishments (e.g. American University of Armenia, USC Dilijan), numerous scholarships, funding education of students of Armenian descent in the top universities of the world (e.g. Lyus foundation, http://www.luys.am/en/scholarship) and many other opportunities (research, internship, etc.) for Armenian youth to acquire knowledge and gain new skills that would be used for development of their homeland have been established through support from Diaspora.

While establishing businesses in Armenia has not been particularly popular among Diaspora Armenians, presumably due to a number of issues of the sector (informal monopoly, corruption, etc.) – the ease of doing business score for Armenia is 35 on the scale from 1-189 (World Bank

2016 [32] ), many expats have founded organizations promoting civil society, democracy, transparency (e.g. The CIVILITAS Foundation, http://civilitasfoundation.org/v3/), free media, research and science development that have played a significant role and have greatly contributed to the capacity building and increasing education and knowledge on democratic principles and freedoms among the population of the country.

*Corruption*

Corruption has been a serious issue hindering democratization and economic development in Armenia since its independence. Deeply embedded at all the level of the government and other institutions, corruption in Armenia is often described as *systemic*, *endemic or persistent*. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Armenia ranks 94$^{th}$ out of 174 countries that have been assessed (for comparison, the neighbouring Georgia ranks 50$^{th}$ – doing significantly better), and receives the score 37, on the scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The public administration, in particular, judiciary, police, healthcare and social sectors, have been identified as most affected by corruption (Transparency International 2014).

USAID and the European Union (EU) have been allocating considerable funds for the fight against corruption in Armenia ($16.5 million and $2 million respectively, according to The Guardian, August 12, 2015), while EU has announced plans to allocate another $23 million for promotion of anti-corruption programmes and civil service reform (www.eurasianet.org). In 2014, the third Anti-Corruption Strategy Paper has been developed and an Anti-Corruption Council established, however, given the past experience and disappointment (with the previous two strategy papers and councils), the majority of the population, as well as the opposition and civil society are sceptical about the effectiveness of the measures, and the latter have refused to participate in the Council's work, calling it a 'show' and citing the extravagant expenditures made by the current Council's head – the Prime Minister, for his business trips and office decoration (Transparency International 2014, The Guardian, August 12, 2015).

Oligarchic government, overlapping political and economic interests – lack of separation between public office and private enterprises, tax evasion by big businesses with connections to the government, weak, dependent on the government and politicized judiciary, patronage and

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[32] http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/armenia/ (accessed January 19, 2016)

monopoly, are some of the most commonly mentioned reasons behind the widespread and persistent corruption plaguing the country (Freedom House 2015, Transparency International 2014).

The measures for fighting corruption in Armenia, proposed by Transparency International's Anti-Corruption office in Yerevan include prevention of conflict of interest and improvement of the asset declaration system for public servants and high-ranking officials (TI 2014).

As further anti-corruption measures, Freedom House (2015) stresses the need for improvement of procurement legislation in Armenia, eliminating the monopoly in the trade sector, strengthening the capacity of the Judiciary and ensuring its independence from the executive power.

### Civil Society

As a response to the international community's efforts to support construction of the missing civil society in post-soviet Armenia, numerous NGOs sprang in the country after its independence, with disproportionally larger numbers registered in the capital Yerevan and the other larger cities.

At present, there are more than 4700 non-governmental organizations (*public organizations* in Armenian) and foundations registered in Armenia (NSS 2015). However, it is estimated that only 15-20% of these organizations are active (operational) (FH 2015).

Lack of financial stability and independence has been named as the main reasons behind inactivity of the NGOs, and one of the obstacles to further development of the NGO sector in the country.

NGOs in Armenia have been described by most of the observers and organizations as 'donor-driven', 'donor-dependent', lacking trust of the population and failing to engage with and involve larger segments of citizens into their activities (Freedom House 2012; Ishkanian 2013a; Paturyan et al 2014, etc.)

In Armenia, the bases of the NGO establishment are provided by the RA Constitution, Article 28 of which declares, *"Everyone has the right to form associations with other persons"*. In 1996, given the increasing number of the NGOs in the country and the need to regulate their registration process and operation, the RA Law on Public Organizations (also known as the RA Law on NGOs) was adopted, which specifies the conditions for registration and the scope of NGO activities, financial accounting and taxation. According the law, in order to get registered, an

NGO should have more than two members, have developed bylaws (charter with NGO's mission, structure, objectives, etc.), hold a founding meeting, at which its leader and oversight are elected, and afterwards, submit the passports of the founding members, together with 2 copies of the bylaws and the minutes of the founding meeting to the Ministry of Justice, with the registration fee of 10.00 AMD (approx. 20 USD). After registration with the Ministry of Justice, the NGOs are required to register with the Department of Revenue Collection (Tax Department) and the Social Insurance Fund. Once the newly founded NGOs receive a tax code, they acquire a status of a legal entity, can open a bank account and start their activity.

While the establishment and registration of the NGOs is commonly considered a simple and relatively easy process, that could also partially explain the large number of the registered NGOs in the country, the process of dissolution of an NGO, on the other hand, is not mandatory, and is considered rather complicated and burdensome, which is suggested to be the reason for so many inactive NGOs not being taken off the registry.

The RA Law on NGOs provides for tax exemption for the grant money, donations and membership fees, and stipulates, that NGOs can engage in income deriving activities and entrepreneurship only through (creation of) another commercial company.

As the informal interviews with NGO representatives indicate, the above-mentioned provision of the law is considered as the main culprit and barrier to NGO self-sustainability and independence.

In 1990-es, given the socio-economic situation in the country – the economic crisis, consequences of the devastating earthquake of 1988, and the inflow of refugees into the country as a result of the war with the neighbouring Azerbaijan, the NGOs were primarily oriented toward the provision of emergency aid, targeting specifically the socially vulnerable layers of the population - people with disabilities, orphans, refugees, women, the elderly, etc. It is noteworthy, that during the 90-es, the NGO sector of Armenia was largely dominated by women: according to a World Learning Survey, around 70% of the NGO leaders in those years were female, as compared to around 40% in late 2000 (ADB, 2011).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Armenian Diaspora were by far the biggest donors of the NGOs throughout the 90-es.

Within the framework of promoting democratization and good governance in Armenia, USAID focused its attention on capacity building of the local NGOs, contracting a number of International organizations to deliver relevant trainings and seminars to the local counterparts, and

build the capacity of the local NGOs to attract grants by strengthening their organizational structure and capacity to professionally complete applications and implement the proposed projects. World Learning's NGO Strengthening Program and NGOC (NGO Training and Resource Center) were among the most widely known and active NGO capacity building organizations in Armenia.

It is contended, that, while the Western donors succeeded in 'seeding' the NGOs and achieving their impressive growth in the post-soviet Armenia, those NGOs remained detached from the general public and were largely unable to either ensure public trust or participation in their activities.

Ishkanian (2007), in her analysis of the civil society in Armenia, refers to 1990-es as the period of 'NGO-ization', or 'NGO engineering'. She argues that Western donors, through allocating funds to the local NGOs, have been imposing their own priorities and reflecting their own vision for the country's democratization and economic development (2013a).

As a result of a number of poor choices of the implemented projects that did not reflect the needs or priorities of the society and were considered as 'artificially created' or imposed, and lack of professionalism (including lack of accountability, transparency, democratic governance within organizations, etc.), NGOs' credibility among the population has been somewhat undermined, triggering more cautions and distrustful attitude. Other unprofessional practices of NGO leaders, including adjusting the organization's mission and objectives in order to be eligible to apply for a certain grant, have further increased the distrust toward NGOs in the country.

Many NGOs started to be viewed and labelled as "grant hunters" or "grant eaters" among the public (Ishkanian 2007-2014). Ishkanian provides a thorough analysis of the effect of the Western aid money on the NGO sector, and the problems that emerged alongside the benefits of those 'fund injections'.

Missing from the discourse on the obstacles to the NGO sector development in Armenia, however, is the issue of 'fake NGOs' or 'sponsored NGOs', created under the patronage of government or other public agency officials, and often registered under the names of their spouses or relatives, to disguise their connection the public sector. The interviews held with the representatives of NGOs, within the framework of this study, confirmed the pervasiveness of this issue, which became especially relevant after the state started allocating certain funding to NGOs in an attempt to demonstrate their increased trust and cooperation with the civil society

representatives. The NGOs with links to the government were systematically 'winning' the announced competitions for the grants and 'hijacking' the funding allocated by various Ministries (e.g. RA Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Social Services, etc.) for NGO projects. In this environment, many NGO leaders felt disappointed and disempowered, and indicated withdrawal from participation in the government-announced grant competitions, as the latter, based on their experience, usually went to 'insiders'. It is suggested that this practice, representing another case of government's reach into and domination over other sectors, has further hindered the development of NGO sector in Armenia.

In general, there is a rather low level of trust among the population toward NGOs. Caucasus Barometer data (CB 2013) indicate that 21% of the Armenians fully distrust NGOs, while 35% - neither trust nor distrust (15% - somewhat trust, and only 3% - fully trust). Under these circumstances, the legitimacy of the NGO activities in the country can be considered as questionable, and it is not surprising that their impact has largely failed to be essential or meaningful.

Obstacles to further development of NGOs in Armenia, most frequently cites by researchers are lack of trust to NGOs among the general public, stemming from the low level of accountability and transparency of the NGOs to their target population or the community at large, inflexibility and restrictions imposed by the RA Law on Public Organizations, which impedes the self-sustainability of NGOs, lack of skills and professionalism among NGO members, resulting in their limited effectiveness and impact (Ishkanian 2007-2013; CIVICUS 2007; FH 2011-2014; ADB 2011; Paturyan et al 2014, etc.).

Other commonly debated (ibid.) obstacles to development of the civil society in Armenia, in line with Howard's (2003) argument regarding the weakness and specifics of civil society in the post-soviet contexts, are the low level of trust, civic engagement and organizational membership in the society.

According to the World Values Survey data (2010-2014), only 10% of the Armenians think that "most people can be trusted", while 87% stand on the opposite side of the scale, finding that "one needs to be very careful". According to the Caucasus Barometer (CB 2013), 30% of the Armenians find that "most people can be trusted".

As regards the level of civic engagement, as measured by volunteering, Caucasus Barometer data (2013) indicate, that 31% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question whether they

volunteered during the previous 6 months. Cross-tabulation done by the age of the respondents demonstrates, that the largest share - 46% of those who volunteered, belonged to the age group 18-35; 38% - volunteered in the age group 36-55, and 16% in the age group 56+.

Analysis of the level of organizational membership in Armenia, based on the World Value Survey data, indicate that only 7% of the respondents are active in at least one organization (Paturyan et al 2014).

CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) that studies and compares civil society in 54 countries (implemented in Armenia by Counterpart International Yerevan Office), assesses the civil society in Armenia as " moderately developed", with relatively strong organizational capacity, but low level of impact and civic engagement (CIVICUS/Armenia 2010).

In her recent book on Democracy Building and Civic Society in Armenia (2013), Ishkanian compares the Western 'grown' NGOs in Armenia to genetically modified crops, which, boosted from inside (i.e. by donor money in case of NGOs), are artificially growing larger, overtaking the space of other crops (i.e. other forms of civil society). Ishkanian contends that USAID and other major donors have been mainly focused on strengthening NGOs and have somewhat ignored the other, more 'traditional', forms of civil society. While this was the case during the first decade of the post-communism, analysis of the projects implemented from mid-2000s, indicates that there has been a shift in USAID's and other donors' focus to include also other civil society actors in their projects aimed at promotion of democracy and good governance in Armenia.

From 2003-2009, USAID funded the Academy for Educational Development (AED) (a US-based non-profit) to implement Youth and Community Action Program (YCAP), which worked with around 80 communities across the country, strengthening the capacity of the existing grassroots to self-mobilize, raise and address their own community issues, in cooperation with local government and other actors within and outside the communities (AED 2008). The capacity building component of the project included assistance with the organizational structure of the groups (youth clubs and community action centres), trainings in Community Action Planning, Civic Education, conferences and study tours, to provide the CBO members with opportunities to exchange experience and discuss collaboration options with the grassroots in the neighbouring CIS countries, etc. It is worth stressing, that YCAP did not provide any financial assistance to the

CBOs, helping only with building their capacity and network for their own activism, neither did it offer guidance or advice on the civic initiatives the grassroots chose to implement (ibid.).

From 2009-2014, USAID continued its assistance to strengthening the CBOs and local civic initiatives across Armenia through Counterpart International (CI). Other USAID programs in this area include Civil Society Organizations Development Program, which aims at increasing the capacities of the civil society organizations to become more business-oriented; Media for Informed Civic Engagement, which aims at increasing the watchdog capacity and literacy of the public media, as well as increasing media representatives' access to independent and reliable sources of information on government's reforms and policies; Civic Engagement in Local Governance program (USAID/Armenia[33]), and other projects, explicitly focusing on other actors of civil society, leaving out the NGOs.

Among other organizations, fostering democratic governance through citizen engagement in Armenia were UNDP, Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) and GIZ.

In 2014, UNDP introduced a system of SMS voting in a number of Armenian communities (5 pilot communities so far), where residents could have their say on the issues relevant to their communities and their priorities by voting on the presented issues from their mobile phones (mobile penetration rate in Armenia is 116%, FH 2015) (www.undo.org)[34].

Due to the efforts and initiates of these major donors, besides NGOs, other forms of civil society, including grassroots, CBOs, youth clubs and community committees/unions have been established and empowered during the past decade. Most of these civil society actors are not officially registered in Armenia, however, as the research and reports of various organizations imply, they have been able to transform the civil society in the country, and have definitely made it more vibrant and diverse.

Another indication of the gradually growing health and capacity of the civil society in Armenia is the spread of the so–called 'civic initiatives' across the country, with most of the major campaigns taking roots and growing in the capital Yerevan, with waves spreading to other larger cities and towns. Having started from environmental campaigns, such as "Save Teghut Forest" (an anti-mining campaign), "Save Trchkan waterfall", "Save Mashtots Park, etc., the civic

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[33] https://www.usaid.gov/armenia/democracy-and-governance (accessed on September 12, 2015)

[34] http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/successstories/armenia--communities-have-their-say-via-sms-polling-.html (accessed on September 23, 2015)

initiatives spread also to other sectors, addressing issues of social, economic, cultural and legal importance. According to different estimates, around 25-50 civic initiatives have been implemented during the previous five years. A detailed account and analysis of the major civic initiatives implemented in Armenia over the past five years, with their outcomes and impact is presented in Chapter 4.

It is noteworthy, that most of the civic initiatives have been started and implemented by youth. In her analysis of the development of environmental civic activism in Armenia, Ishkanian (2013b) describes the participants as a group, composed of 20-200 young people, aged 20-45, and suggests that one of the factors behind the rise of civic activism in the country has been coming of age of the first post-soviet generation.

It is suggested that further study of the civic initiatives and activism in the country, as well as that of 'the main actors' – the initiators and participants of those civic actions, could shed light on the situation and trends with civic participation and health of civil society in the country, and confirm or dispute Howard's (2003) prognosis regarding the need for a generational change, before any lasting societal change can occur.


## *3.3. Development and Civic Participation in Armenia*

As it has been earlier mentioned, the first years of Armenia's independence were marred by unprecedented economic and social hardships, caused by the disruption of all the economic ties and closure of most of the plants, factories and enterprises; unemployment, inflation, electricity and natural gas deficit and regular blackouts, consequences of the devastating earthquake of 1988, Karabakh war and closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey - have all added up and resulted in widespread poverty, out-migration, apathy and disillusionment of the population with the ideas of democracy and civic participation.

After the ceasefire in the war in 1994 and the initial shock of the economic crisis, Armenia started experiencing slow recovery and, supported by the international organizations, has implemented a number of reforms and measures directed to transitioning to free market economy - reducing the role of the government in the economy, contracting out social service delivery, and implementing other measures prescribed by the Washington Consensus and the PRSP initiative.

In the development thought and practice, it has been increasingly acknowledged that the

effectiveness and sustainability of local development efforts are dependent upon the level and quality of local participation and ownership of the process, as well as effective cooperation of civil society, private sector and the local government in decision-making regarding the issues affecting community's life and effective utilization of the local resources, including human and social capital, for improvement of the wellbeing in the community for all.

It has been also recognized that cooperation of civil society organizations and the local government can directly contribute to the local or regional economic growth by fostering development of private businesses, small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and cooperatives in the given locality (e.g. Snavely and Desai 2001).

Today, after more than two decades of 'transition'- reforms in the economic, political and social sectors, and considerable reduction in the poverty rates, as well as the economic growth registered in the country, still around one third of the population (32%) lives below the absolute poverty line (NSS 2014). Despite the improved economic performance, Armenia still has a long way to go in terms of the ability to harness the economic growth for the purposes of reduction of poverty and inequality levels, and improvement of the living standards of the population.

Armenia's practice with PRSP and other 'anti-poverty' strategies and development policies has been largely evaluated as unsatisfactory in terms of the state's ability or will to involve citizens and reflect their views and priorities in the reform packages (UN, UNDP Armenia 2005, Babajanian 2006, etc.).

The capital city Yerevan, where one third of the population lives and works, is the main economic hub of the country, accounting for more than 60% of the country's GDP (ibid.). The contrast of the capital with the rest of the towns and villages is striking; poverty and unemployment are particularly widespread and sharply felt in the rural areas, which, as a result, are being deserted at an alarming rate, with residents migrating either abroad or within the country - to larger towns and the capital, in pursuit of jobs and a better living. Against this backdrop, there is a pressing need for well-informed, locally driven, effective policies to address the issue of growing regional disparities and to foster equitable and sustainable development across the country.

Devolution of power that took place among other reforms in Armenia, aimed at improving the communities' economic performance and standard of living. The underlying assumption was that the local governments are closer to the citizens, and thus, are better informed of their needs and

priorities, and are better equipped and positioned to provide services to them (Tumanyan 2001). However, as numerous sources indicate, in Armenia, local government bodies themselves lack means for community problem solving and remain dependent on the regional and central government, benefactors and international donors for financial resources necessary to address the pressing issues in the communities.

As regards participation of the citizens in their own development, the foundations of that notion are laid in the country's Constitution (1995) and the RA Law on Local Self-Governance (2002), which further details the role and principles of local governance that are declared to be based on public participation by means of which people exercise their will and govern through the elected Mayor and the Community Council ("Avagani", translated also as Community Aldermen). However, neither the Constitution, nor the Law on Local Self-governance provides any details or concrete ways and mechanisms of public participation in decision-making.

According to the law, the Community Council should hold meetings at least once in two months, and should publish beforehand the agenda of the upcoming sessions for the community. The Community Council is entitled to discuss and take a decision regarding any issue related to the community, its development and public services. The decisions are passed by a simple majority vote. The law mentions that the Community Council sessions are open to public, which implies that the local community members can attend them and take part in the discussion of the issues of interest to them, as well as voice their priorities and make proposals.

In practice, however, the community members' participation in the Community Council sessions is rather limited across the country, mainly due to the lack of time, knowledge and awareness of rights on the part of the community. Several studies also mention lack of trust towards the local government as a significant impediment for public participation in the community affairs (e.g. Tumanyan 2001, Babajanian 2008).

The RA Law on Local Self-Governance stipulates that the newly elected Mayors should draw a four-year community development plan, taking into account the community's priorities, and present the plan for discussion, amendments and approval at the Community Council session. The law doesn't elaborate on the ways and methods of taking into account the community's priorities, thus, leaving it at the discretion of the community Mayor to take measures ensuring that the community development plan reflects the needs and priorities of the community.

It can be anticipated that under these circumstances, the factor of the Mayor's personality or

'agency'- education level and attitudes to own community, as well as the social capital – networks and connections of the latter, play a decisive role in the matter of implementation of this requirement. So does the activeness of the civil society in the community.

With the view of increasing citizen participation in local development in Armenia and improving the quality of participation, a number of donor organizations have funded interventions aimed at promotion of decentralized, community-driven policy making and empowerment of local people to participate in problem identification and decision-making regarding the community's priorities and budget allocations.

These organizations include the United States Agency for Development (USAID), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank (WB), Counterpart International (CI), REC Caucasus, etc. Most of the projects supporting community driven and participatory development address the issue of empowerment of the local population to take an active stance and participate in their own development, and promote good governance by demanding accountability and transparency from the local government. A significant share of the projects is being implemented in rural communities in order to address the issue of regional disparities and help reduce poverty, improve public service delivery and create economic opportunities in the deprived rural areas. UNDP, for instance, has implemented more than 150 projects aimed at revival of social and economic infrastructure in deprived communities. Most of the projects have been based on participatory approaches and design of a strategic plan for community development. Promotion of SME development and creation of farmers' associations and fostering other economic activity in the communities has been another important line of the UNDP activity in Armenia.

USAID has also been generously funding projects aimed at promotion of good governance, community mobilization and participation in local development. Through USAID funding, a number of international organizations, including Academy for Educational Development (AED), Counterpart International (CI), Eurasia Foundation (EF), Freedom of Information Center Armenia (FINCA) and others, have implemented projects addressing the issues of participatory governance, empowerment of the communities, increasing civic activism of the population, promotion of democracy and good governance.

Counterpart International, for example, has implemented "Local Government Incentive Grants" Project, which aimed at community mobilization and enabling individuals and organizations to

affect change in their communities in a participatory way, promoting cooperation among the local government, civil society and citizens (http://program.counterpart.org/Armenia/). Projects designed as a result of such collaboration received funding from CI. The condition for receiving a grant from CI was a 40% co-funding from the community, which was believed to be a necessary condition for increasing the local ownership of the project.

Reports of the organizations, evaluating the impact of those projects typically indicate positive changes and achievements of the projects. However, there is very little independent research that would impartially assess and analyze the impact of those interventions on the communities and on their progress with development.

One of the few such undertakings is Babajanian's (2005) research on the impact of a specific intervention, aimed at fostering bottom-up and community driven development by means of community's involvement in their own development, that was implemented by the Armenia Social Investment Fund (ASIF) through a grant from the World Bank (WB). The findings of the research, however, indicate that the project has not had any significant impact on the communities' organization and the nature of community's participation in development (ibid.) Babajanian arrives at the conclusion, that efforts aimed at developing civic institutions might not be successful without changes in the nature of governance in the country. The research also indicates that people have had very limited participation in decision-making, and the main form of participation has been labor – the community was contributing their time and physical labor to carry out public works in the village. The study also indicates that the Mayors remain the ones who took decisions, and they viewed the WB/ASIF's project not as a means for empowerment of the community and building local capacity, but merely as funds to direct to the improvement of the community infrastructure, and community meetings have been held not with the view of involving the citizens in decision-making, but mostly to satisfy the ASIF's requirement and to mobilize the community contribution (ibid.) Thus, it was concluded, that the project had failed to alter the institutional settings and social relations in the communities and was not effective in fostering participation in the community development.

Institutional change has been considered as one of the main challenges of effective decentralization policies in transition economies (e.g. Wetzel 2001, Babajanian 2005).

Decades of central planning under the soviet regime and 'soviet mentality' are often cited as reasons for weak institutions, both political and economic ones, in the post-soviet contexts (e.g.

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Mondak and Gearing 1998; UNDP 2002, Howard 2002, Ishkanian 2003).

Whereas, in regards with civic participation, Babajanian (2006) suggests that its main obstacle is not the 'soviet mentality' or cultural factors, but availability of limited free time and local capacity of the community, as well as lack of cooperation between the community members and the local government. As an important factor impeding participation in the post-soviet environment, Babajanian cites poor governance and unwillingness of local leaders to share power and engage in collective action with the community members (2006).

In his study of civic participation in the Armenian communities, Babajanian (2008) argues that distrust towards state institutions is another issue that impedes collaboration between the government and communities. He contends, that for genuine citizen participation in development efforts, the latter should be politicized and aimed at building 'political capital' of the poor to empower them to change the existing power structure, which, on the other hand, can create problems and jeopardize stability in the communities. He notes that all the community driven projects close down after the withdrawal of the agencies from the communities, and some 'islands of democracy' created as a result of 'community driven projects' may not be effective or viable in the general undemocratic environment (Babajanian 2008:1317). Babajanian suggests that promoting citizen participation should also be on the government's agenda and the public institutions should create 'space' for citizen participation.

Echoing this argument, the World Bank[35] is also emphasizing the importance of creation of an 'enabling environment" for civic participation, which is described as *"a set of conditions- often inter-related- that impact on the capacity of citizens and civil society organizations to engage in development processes in a sustained and effective manner…"*. Those conditions refer to the legal, regulatory, political, socio-economic, cultural and other factors that affect citizens' potential and ability to participate in development (ibid.).

In the light of the above-mentioned decentralization reforms in Armenia, as well as the projects funded by the international donors with the aim of strengthening the capacity of the Armenian citizens to cooperate with the local government and participate in their own development,

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[35] World Bank website: http://go.worldbank.org/4JJJ1MKSZ0, (accessed September 23, 2015)

empirical evidence regarding the outcome of those efforts can provide more information and knowledge on the achievements and gaps, and sketch the existing challenges and opportunities.

## *3.4. Conclusion*

This chapter has presented the local context of Armenia and has outlined the main framework, situation and reforms pertinent to the areas of democracy building and local development.

Armenia's experience and trajectory of transition toward democracy and free market economy has been discussed, with a review and description of all the major reforms and commitments that the government of Armenia has undertaken since declaring independence in 1991.

The challenges and obstacles that have arisen on Armenia's path to democracy and economic growth have been presented and discussed. Numerous factors, such as historical legacies, soviet mentality, weak and 'extractive' institutions, lack of rule of law, pervasive corruption, overlapping political and economic interests, lack of trust to the government and the political system, weak civil society, and a number of other problems and issues that have affected the Armenian post-soviet context and transition efforts have been analyzed with the view of providing a comprehensive picture of the current situation and the trends, to prepare the ground for further analysis of civic participation and its impact in this context.

After a quarter of century of reforms aimed at democratization, Armenia's regime is still classified by Freedom House (2015) as "Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian", and there are numerous issues requiring redress and further improvement in the system of governance, elections, political parties, local self-governance and other areas accountable for the progress of democratic transformation.

Among opportunities for improvement, Armenia's efforts and progress in the area of *e-democrac*y has been discussed, and the role and potential of Internet and communication technology (ICT) expansion, and its utilization for promotion of democratic practices, including improvement of citizens' access to information, increase of public agencies' responsiveness, accountability and transparency has been described and analyzed.

The chapter has provided a detailed account of Armenia's experience with civil society building since the early transition period, has outlined the international donors' input and impact on the

NGO sector formation and development in the country, as well as presented the main causes behind the weakness of the present –day civil society in Armenia.

Lack of independence from donors, inflexible legal framework restricting self-sustainability of NGOs, lack of capacity and professionalism of the NGO members, NGOs' detachment from the community/general public, lack of trust toward NGOs among the population, and a number of other issues, including unfair competition (patronage of certain 'sponsored NGOs'), low level of acknowledgement from and cooperation with the government, etc., have been identified as some of the key challenges of the NGO sector development in the country.

It has been suggested that while, during the first decade of independence, the international donors' efforts aimed at assisting Armenia's democratization have been focused mainly on NGO sector strengthening, the recent decade witnessed a shift in that focus, as the major international donors, including USAID, UNDP and GIZ, started funding implementation of projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of other civil society actors, namely grassroots, community based organizations (CBOs), media, etc. The same is true about the focus of the Armenian Diaspora's investment in the development of their ancestral country: due to philanthropic and charitable activity of many businessmen and investors of Armenian decent, numerous organizations, funds, scholarships, educational establishments and research centers have been founded in Armenia with the purpose of fostering democracy, transparency, accountability, free media and otherwise increasing awareness and capacity of the population to become more active agents for democracy and development in their country.

During the recent years, new actors emerged in the Armenian civil society arena – CBOs and civically active (mostly young) citizens, who initiate and implement civic actions/initiatives and campaigns across the country, addressing various issues related to environmental, legal, socio-economic and other spheres.

It is suggested that the study and assessment of these CBOs and the new forms of civic participation in the country can provide further information and new insights on the current status and potential of the civil society to assume its role of counterbalancing the state and further promoting democratization in Armenia.

The chapter has also presented Armenia's development trajectory and outlined the reforms aimed at economic recovery and local development since the country's independence, with a specific accent on the role and practice of citizen participation in those efforts.

Taking into account the increasing recognition and appreciation of the importance of civic participation for economic growth and achievement of more inclusive and lasting development outcomes, the chapter has explored the available research on the experience and impact of citizen involvement in the development interventions in Armenia, has analyzed the existing barriers to more meaningful civic participation, as well as has outlined the general framework for further research and analysis of civic participation in local development efforts.

# CHAPTER 4. CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND ITS IMPACT IN ARMENIA: CIVIC AWAKENING?

## *4.1. Introduction*

This chapter examines civic participation – its forms, patterns, indicators, and its impact on democratization and development outcomes in Armenia.

For a comprehensive study of civic engagement practices and identification of the participants, their incentives, obstacles to participation and opportunities for it, civic participation has been examined at two levels –community and national/country level.

Ten rural and small urban communities have been selected for the study  - one from each of the 10 regions of the country, and observation, key informant interviews and focus group meetings have been conducted in those communities to collect information and gain insights on civic participation forms, patterns, practices, determinants, obstacles, opportunities, as well as the impact of civic participation on democratic and development outcomes at the community level.

The study of civic participation (with its forms, patterns, trends and impact) at the country level has been carried out by means of reviewing and analysing the major civic initiatives that were implemented in Armenia over the recent five years (during 2010-2015). The number of participants – at least a few thousand people, and received wide media coverage have been used as the criteria for characterizing a civic initiative as *major* and including it in this research. Despite the fact that most of these initiatives took place in the capital Yerevan, with some, spreading also to other larger cities (Gyumri, Vanadzor, Dilijan, etc.), participation in most of those initiatives has been country-wide, as a sizeable portion of demonstrators have been commuting (due to the relatively small distances in the country, Yerevan can be reached on an average by 1 to 2.5 hours' drive from most of the regional centres) or staying in the capital (mostly students coming from all the regions and communities of the country to study in the higher educational establishments in Yerevan) during the protests.

Media coverage review and analysis, as well as observation of the unfolding events on the ground, informal interviews with the civic activists and direct insights from the demonstration sites have been used for analysis of the civic initiatives and assessment of their impact or potential to influence the course of policy in the country.

The above-mentioned studies have complemented each other and provided comprehensive information and data on civic participation practice, challenges and opportunities, as well as the impact of civic participation on democratization and development processes in Armenia.

## *4.2. Civic Participation in Communities Across Armenia*

One community has been randomly selected from the list of the communities of each of the 10 marzes (regions) of Armenia (available at www.mtaes.am for each separate marz) for a closer research and study of civic participation (forms, patterns, trends, opportunities and obstacles) and its impact on democratization and development outcomes in those communities. Brief community profiles have been created for the selected rural or small urban communities (the Marz centres, which are the largest towns in any given region, have been deliberately omitted from the lists), to identify and present the strategic information, such as institutions available in the community, businesses, CSOs, including community-based (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc.

Focus group meetings and key informant interviews have been conducted in the selected communities with the view of colleting data and gaining insights on the issues of interest to the research.

Close attention has been paid particularly to the level of community's participation in decision-making processes, cooperation of the local self-governance bodies with the CSOs, SMEs and other organizations/actors existing in the community, transparency of the local self-governance bodies and the familiarity of the residents with the community development plan and the community budget and allocations from it.

Given the sensitive nature of the issues discussed during the focus group meetings and key informant interviews, the anonymity of the respondents has been guaranteed, to make them feel more comfortable about participating, answering questions and expressing honest opinions. Similarly, for anonymity reasons, first letters of the names of the sampled communities have been used instead of their full names in the discussion (in case of more than one community starting with the same letter, numbers have been used after the first letter to help differentiate between the communities).

Table 4 presents the case study communities and their brief profiles.

*Table 4: Case Study Community Profiles*

1. Aragatsotn Marz: D – a rural community, population – 752, has a school, a library, a post-office. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Among priority problems are repair of community roads, irrigation water system installation, street- lighting installation, etc.

2. Ararat Marz: S – a rural community, population: 2874, has a school, a kindergarten, a library, a post office, a medical unit. Main sources of livelihood are agriculture, cattle- and poultry-breeding. The community has large pastures. A priority problem is repair of the community roads.

3. Armavir Marz: A1 – a rural community, population – 374, has a secondary school and a kindergarten, no house of culture, sports facilities or any businesses.

4. Gegharkounik Marz: T – an urban community, population – 9327, has 3 basic (secondary) schools and a high school, two kindergartens, a library, a sports club, a house of culture, a sport facility, a music school, an arts school, four SMEs, 3 transportation companies, 2 construction companies, 8 service providing companies, and about 20 small shops. Regional services of mobile phone providers (Organge, ArmenTel, VivaCell) have small offices and a few employees in the town.

5. Kotayk Marz: M - a rural community, population – 880, has a secondary school, a small shop, no NGOs, no house of culture, main sources of livelihood are agriculture and cattle-breeding.

6. Lori Marz: A2 - an urban community, population- 2500. There are two secondary schools in the community, 5 kindergartens, a house of culture, a polyclinic, a hospital, a library, a sports field, and a hotel. A mining and processing plant is the biggest enterprise in the community; there is also a bakery and a diary plant. Among the priority issues of the community are repair of roads, repair of schools and acquisition of new furniture for the schools, installation of night lights in the town, repair of drinking water pipes, etc.

7. Shirak Marz: A3 – a rural community, population – 9211, has 3 basic schools, one high school, a kindergarten, arts school, a library, a house of culture, several small shops and other businesses, an NGO.

8. Syunik Marz: G1- a rural community, population – 632, cattle-breeding and agriculture are the main sources of livelihood in the village, has a secondary school and a medical unit.

9. Tavush Marz: K - a rural community, population - 2215, has a school, a kindergarten, a medical unit, House of Culture, a post office. Priority problems in the community are gasification, street lighting, road repair, irrigation water system installation, etc.

10. Vayots Dzor: G2 – a rural community, population – 287, has a school and a medical unit.

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| Community priorities include repair of roads, street lighting, etc. |

The sample includes eight rural communities and two urban ones. The smallest community in the sample is G2, with the population of 287, and the largest community is T, with the population of 9327.

As it has been noted earlier, the difference between the modern European-city like capital Yerevan and the rest of Armenia is shocking. It would seem that there are virtually two different countries - seemingly affluent Yerevan, where more than 1/3 of the total population of Armenia resides, and the rest of Armenia - underdeveloped, with poor infrastructure, poor roads and housing conditions, with widespread unemployment and persistent poverty.

Travelling to the communities has been a rather challenging experience: first of all, because of the poor road conditions, especially in the villages located farther from the main roads, and secondly – because of the widespread poverty and depressing situation in the rural or small urban settlements where most people's every day is a struggle for daily bread. Very often, I had the feeling that my visits and requests for meetings initially raised some expectations of a possible new program or aid, however, after explanation of the purposes of my visit, the residents were still polite and mostly eager to talk and share.

***Institutions and Establishments in the Communities***

The main institution representing the RA government at the community level is Municipality, which is typically located in a building in the central part of the village or town. Municipalities (or City Halls) in larger rural and urban communities also house some municipal agencies, and in case of the regional centres - also regional offices of the RA Social Service Agency and the RA Social Insurance Fund.

The Municipalities of the small urban communities I visited during my field research trips were open during the work hours and there were some representatives of the local administration present in the building upon my first, unannounced visit, while in some smaller rural communities, Municipalities were closed. In those cases I had to leave a message for the community leader about the date and time of my next visit. In the Village Municipalities that were open, I could immediately get a reception by the Mayors. In case they were not present or were

busy elsewhere, I met with the Municipality accountants, for an initial interview and an appointment for meetings with the Mayor and the community.

In the smaller communities, as I found out later, Mayors' absence was rather common, as the community leaders were said to have either some business they had to attend during the work hours (e.g. work on their land-plot, oversee a small business they had elsewhere, etc.), or were on a business trip in the regional administration offices. In all cases, however, the Mayors were described as hard-working and accommodating any reception or meeting needs the community might have.

In 8 out of the 10 communities visited, the Municipality buildings had information boards with the Mayor's reception hours, some information on the on-going projects or programmes, and announcements. However, upon a closer look, most of the information and announcements appeared to be out-dated. In 4 communities, I found some information on the community development plan, agenda for the past or an upcoming community council meeting, community budget and priority issues posted on the Municipality building walls, which was a considerable progress compared to the situation a few years earlier. Many of the communities also had announcements (in most of the cases - out-dated) with logos of international organizations, such as USAID, EU, GIZ.

In addition to the Municipality, the larger rural and urban communities had at least one high school, a sports facility, a few kindergartens, a post-office, a house of culture (which typically represented a building that hosted a small library and a community event hall, and in some villages - also arts and music schools), hospitals or polyclinics, a number of shops and some other businesses, a few NGOs or a CBO - a youth club or a community centre, typically hosted in the Municipality building or the community House of Culture. The smaller rural communities, besides the Municipality, had only one basic school, a kindergarten and a small medical unit/ambulatory. Residents of these communities had to commute to the nearest larger villages or towns for any medical or shopping needs, as well as the high school students had to walk to a neighbouring village to attend school. In two small rural communities there were youth/community clubs, but they were locked at the time of the visit. There was a registered NGO in two of the smaller rural communities, however, they did not have any active project at the time of the research.

*Most Common Problems in the Armenian Communities*

The socio-economic situation varied from one community to another, however, all the communities had a host of common problems: poverty and lack of a reliable source of livelihood, unemployment and related to it out-migration, poor inter - and inside- community roads, absence of street lighting, absence of a garbage collection mechanism, problems with drinking water supply system (some districts had a schedule for running water, while some - had no water at all, and the residents had to carry water from the neighbouring houses or install a self-made system to pump water to their house), absence of irrigation water system, lack of public transportation to neighbouring communities, the regional centres and the capital, etc.

While the picture was rather bleak in some communities, others boasted a number of solved problems, such as putting in place a water supply and distribution system, community gasification, solution of transportation problem or solution of the garbage collection and disposal problem.

*Civic Participation in Communities*

The perception of community members about what civic participation represented varied from one community to another. In the majority of the communities, civic participation was perceived mainly as volunteering in the community by organizing some *'civic action'*, examples of which were village clean-up, river-bank clean-up, tree planting, organization of Christmas parties or summer camps for community children, organization of awareness-raising campaigns on important for the community issues (most often, ecological or environment issues have been cited as examples), etc. In many communities, the residents also indicated their participation in the community meetings and discussion of community issues, participation in an activity organized by the community leader, such as fixing a road or a bridge in the community, a school or kindergarten repair, harvest, haymaking, food and wine festival, a 'barbeque festival', etc.

While during the focus group meetings there were numerous cases of discussion of helping neighbours, fund-raising, money collection and donations for various purposes in the community, such as renovation of school, Municipality building, house of culture, and other strategic structures in the community, donations to children from socially vulnerable families and orphanages, etc., donating was not immediately viewed as civic participation, but merely as fulfilment of people's moral duty.

Civic initiatives and actions, most frequently implemented in the communities, can be summarized under the following categories:

(1) physical work/labour

(2) organization of cultural and sports events

(3) organization of awareness-raising campaigns

(4) donation/organization of fund-raising campaigns, drives, etc.

(5) participation in decision-making

*Volunteering*

In all the 10 communities, residents reported helping each other and volunteering to fix a problem in the community. In the communities with active youth clubs or community centres (or committees), reports of volunteering and helping the community members were more frequent, with examples ranging from help with renovation of a neighbour's house, roof or water supply system, to help with harvesting or transporting the agricultural produce to the regional centre, etc. Youth club members were also actively involved in volunteering, including organization of community clean–ups, tree-planting and various awareness-raising campaigns (environmental, human rights related, etc.) or seminars for the community.

Younger people appeared to be more actively involved in volunteering activities, such as clean-ups, organization of fund-raising campaigns, seminars, etc. While, typically, older men were more actively involved in repairs and physical work in the community (road repair, etc.) or helping neighbours.

The most frequently indicated incentives for volunteering in the communities were:

- Desire to help the community, neighbours, relatives (philanthropy)
- Self-fulfilment/increased self-esteem
- Feeling of belonging
- (Expectation of) gaining more experience, learning new skills and improving career opportunities
- Spending free time

The most frequently mentioned obstacles to volunteering were:

- lack of free time

- unwillingness to engage in an activity with others /distrust

- sense of disempowerment/lack of belief that their participation will matter

- health issues

*Membership in Organizations*

In all the 10 communities, at least a few people reported belonging to an organization, most often - a CBO, an NGO or a youth union. Only in 2 communities out of 10, more than 5 focus group meeting participants reported about belonging to an organization. Membership in organizations was higher in the urban communities than in the rural ones. However, overall, organizational membership among the residents of the rural and small urban communities was rather low.

The most frequently mentioned incentives for membership in an organization were:

- acquiring new skills, experience, and improving carrier opportunities

- prospects of being employed by that organization in the future

- family/friends in the organization

- feeling of belonging/association with others

- philanthropy

The most frequently indicated obstacles to membership in an organization were:

- lack of free time

- no organizations/groups in the community

- have not been offered/have not thought of it

- distrust to organizations

*Accessing, Sharing and Exchanging Information (Including via ICT)*

In all the communities, around 70%[36] of the focus group meetings participants reported regularly watching news on TV, and around 10% - listening to news on radio.

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[36] The percentages given during the discussion of community research results are based on rough calculation of the portion of the focus group meeting participants who responded positively or negatively to the given question.

Newspaper readership was quite low in the urban communities (only 2 in ten participants indicated reading newspapers on regular basis), while in a number of rural communities nobody received or brought any newspapers.

Despite the fact that nearly all mobile phone companies boast full Internet coverage on the territory of Armenia, the research showed that residents of the towns had better access to Internet, compared to the residents of the rural communities, in some of which the signal was said to be too weak or available only in certain spots/locations in the village.

About 60% of the focus group meeting participants in the urban communities reported having regular access to Internet and accessing news from various local online newspapers. Younger participants appeared to be more active users of Internet, and reported mostly using their mobile phones for accessing Internet. In community T, only 4 out of 13 focus group meeting participants reported having a personal computer (PC) or a laptop for using Internet, however, the residents indicated that they could use the computer of the community action club (provided by an international organization), to access news on Internet, whenever they needed.

In A2, 5 focus group participants out of 14 reported having a PC or a laptop and accessing news on Internet.

The youth appeared to be the most active users of Internet in all the communities, and indicated accessing and sharing information and news on Facebook, "Odnoklassniki", other (mostly local) forums, blogs, etc.

In all the communities, the interviewees and focus group meeting participants indicated discussing news with their families and neighbours - in their houses, at schools, gathering in the town or village club or centre, etc.

*Voting in Elections*

To the question about voting in elections, the majority (approximately 80%) of the focus group participants answered positively, and indicated that last time they had voted during community leader's elections or during the Presidential elections in 2013. There seemed to be a general consensus among the focus group participants about the importance of voting for the purposes of contributing to democracy promotion in the country. Only during one focus group meeting a participant (middle-aged man) expressed a contrary view, saying: *"I don't vote, because I have had many chances to get convinced that our voting means nothing: they manipulate and falsify*

*the results of all elections, in our village too – we knew well before the elections who was going to be the Mayor".*

This citizen was voicing his distrust toward the system of elections in the country and indicated his protest by 'not voting' in the elections, and some participants agreed with his statement, however, after some heated discussion on the subject, they concluded that *"voting was better than not voting".*

Whereas "Voting or Not Voting" was not a big question in the other communities, in 4 of them discussion about the importance of voting was followed by some kind of critique of the election process in the country and description of witnessed violations, while in another 4 communities, the focus group participants' perception of voting was that of 'supporting the Mayor', which was indicative of the lack of awareness of election goals and mechanisms, and seemed to confirm the reports of 'controlled' elections in the regions.

*Political and Civic Action, Including Online Political and Civic Activism*

In discussion of community members' involvement in causes, campaigns and social movements, typically, urban community residents were more active, indicating their involvement in various causes, including charitable ones, appealing to the local self-governance bodies for reconsidering a decision, starting and signing various petitions, including signing online petitions (www.change.org was mentioned as one of the websites where they had recently signed a petition).

As regards community's involvement in decision-making and solution of community's priorities, in 3 out of 10 communities, the residents reported taking part in the Community Council meetings and having a say in the allocation of the community resources. In a number of communities, not all the residents were aware of their right to take part and express their views in the Community Council meetings. In many of the communities visited, information on the upcoming Community Council meetings and their agenda were not readily available to the community members, neither was the community budget discussed with the residents.

The focus group participants in the community A2 noted that before preparing the community's four-year development plan and presenting it for discussion and approval to the Community Council, the Mayor had called a community meeting and discussed the plan with the community, and their views were subsequently included in the plan. In some communities (A1, M, K), the

respondents did not recall any meetings to discuss the community development plan, and they expressed an opinion that the document was perhaps a formal one, containing the basic points/projects that were relevant to all the rural communities. Information received from a number of key informant interviews indicated that the educational level of some village Mayors was not always adequate for the position, and suggested that there was a practice of obtaining a development plan of another village and copying it - with the justification that all the rural communities have more or less the same problems in Armenia.

As to the process of designing the community development plan in A3 and T, it was mentioned, that special discussion groups were created and the plan was presented, discussed and modified during those meetings with the citizens. It was also noted that the budgets of all the communities are now available online on the website of the corresponding Marz (region), under the name of the given community. This was the initiative of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration (www.mta.gov.am), and the links were available from their website. However, it was found out that while most of the community budgets were posted on the website, the development plans of many communities were not available online.

In 7 out of 10 communities, the residents were generally aware of the community development plans, at least, regarding the key issues and areas they addressed.

In the interviews with the community leaders, some of them mentioned that while the information on the community budget and development plan was open and available to the citizens, as well as accessible online under the name of their community on www.mtaes.am site, not many citizens expressed interest to familiarize themselves with those documents, or to discuss and present ideas or proposals for improvement.

In all the 10 communities included in the sample, the residents gave a positive answer to the question about community's collaboration with the local self-governance bodies. Especially in the communities T, A2 and A3, multiple examples of such collaboration were provided.

In T, the community action centre members had requested detailed information on the community budget and the development plan from the Municipality's financial officer and the community leader, and had organized a community meeting to present the budget to the residents and discuss the community's priorities and ideas for solution of the existing problems. A document with the input from the community was developed and presented to the Municipality, after which certain

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changes have been made to the community development plan. The focus group meeting participants also noted that the community members carried out most of the required physical work for fixing community problems on volunteer basis.

As a result of community's collaboration with the Municipality, the Regional Office, and the Armenian Water and Sewerage company's branch in the town (community T) community's drinking water system and the quality of water which had been an issue for many years, was finally improved by means of replacing the old piping.

Another example of civic initiative and community's collaboration with the Municipal and regional local self-governance bodies in the community T was solution of the public transportation problem. The community members campaigned about the need to have public transportation, connecting the town with the regional centre, and mediated between the regional Department of Transportation and owners of minivans in the town. Having presented the result of their analysis of the transportation needs of the community, they proposed a business plan for their collaboration. As a result of this civic initiative, the minivan owners united to establish a transportation company, which was subsequently licenced by the Department of Transport to serve the public transportation needs on the approved routes, connecting the community to the neighbouring town and the regional centre. Among other benefits, this initiative has also resulted in addressing the issue of students' poor attendance to the University situated in the regional centre.

As other examples of community – local self-government body collaboration, focus group participants mentioned numerous campaigns during which they raised the community's needs and issues in front of the Municipality and the regional office, and subsequently collaborated for solution of those problems. In A2 and A3, where there were youth clubs or community action centres established within the framework of international organizations, in some instances, the community members also mentioned receiving certain funding – small grants (from USAID funded Counterpart International) for implementing the micro-projects they had proposed.

During a focus group meeting, the residents of A2 noted that they were quite actively involved in the decision-making processes regarding identification of the priority issues in the town, and have proposed and implemented numerous civic initiatives in the community, many of them - in cooperation with he Municipality or an international organization. Repair of water supply system,

installation of street lights, renovation of the ambulatory and opening the 3<sup>rd</sup> kindergarten in the community have been mentioned as examples of such cooperation.

Numerous other cases of collaboration of the communities with the local self-governance bodies and the local, regional or national NGOs, and sometimes - private businesses, have been described during the focus group meeting. While a significant portion of those collaborations was directed to addressing a certain community issue or solving a problem, an even larger share of examples was concerning collaboration in organization of a community event, most often of cultural, sports or environmental nature.

*Donating*

As it has been already mentioned, donating for causes, charities, or simply helping out a neighbour experiencing hardship was quite common in the communities. The donations were not very sizeable, most probably, conditioned by the difficult financial situation of the residents, but citizens' participation had undoubtedly helped to make a difference in the communities.

In a number of communities, the focus group meeting participants mentioned organizing fund-raising campaigns to support a certain vulnerable group. For instance, in A2, the residents regularly donated money for supporting an orphanage, in G2, the residents collected money to pay the electricity bills of a number of lone pensioners throughout winter, etc. In many communities, the residents collected money for certain repair needs of the community school, kindergarten or the house of culture. In the urban communities, where nearly all the residents had a mobile phone, the focus group meeting participants also mentioned about donations by means of SMS for various causes.

## *4.3. Impact of Civic Participation on Democratization and Development in Armenian Communities*

The information obtained during interviews and focus group meetings in the case study communities has demonstrated that the impact of civic participation on democratization and development outcomes in the Armenian communities varied from one community to another, ranging from being very significant to rather superficial.

In a number of communities, civic activism of the residents, their involvement in the community affairs, participation in community council meetings, discussions of community development plan

and budget, collaboration with the local self-governance, regional and national bodies, as well as cooperation and networking with local and international organizations, including NGOs and CBOs, have resulted in considerable benefits for the community, and have significantly improved accountability and transparency of the local municipalities and community councils. As a result of community's civic activism, numerous opportunities and collaborations have been established, such as SMEs, public private partnerships (PPPs), new businesses, etc., that have contributed to expansion of economic prospects in those communities, and improved the overall well-being of the residents. Active involvement of citizens in decision-making regarding the issues affecting the community has allowed incorporating their priorities and wishes in the community development plan, thereby increasing its efficiency and allowing to direct the scarce financial resources available in the community to the areas of real need.

In other communities, civic participation remained at a rather low level, being manifested mainly as volunteering, carrying out physical work (public works) to fix a common problem in the community, organizing clean-ups, cultural and sports events, accessing and discussing news, organizing occasional fund-raising campaigns, and donation to causes and charities. In these communities, civic participation did not appear to have any meaningful or significant impact on decision-making, quality of the local institutions or other democracy related outcome. Neither it had brought about any significant benefits, opportunities or prospects for economic development of those communities.

## *4.4. Major Civic Initiatives Implemented in Armenia, Their Outcomes and Impact*

Civic initiatives and movements are a relatively new phenomenon in the post-soviet context of Armenia. The first major civic initiative can be traced back to the year 2007, when a group of active young people mobilized and started a campaign aimed at preventing destruction of Teghut forest by the planned mining activity, as well as initiated a movement to preserve historical buildings in Yerevan. It is peculiar that the participants of those civic initiatives are mainly youth, more specifically, those who were born shortly before or after the fall of the Soviet Union, and, as a result, have been less influenced by the 'soviet mentality' of dependence on the state, fear of individual action, or other inhibitions and restrictions posed by the former intrusive and dictatorial state. Being raised and educated in a more liberal context, in at least on paper, a 'democratic' state, in the era of Internet, this generation is, without any doubt, more educated about democracy,

citizenship and human rights and is less afraid to take an action to protect their own or others' rights.

The representatives of the older generations, on the other hand, are often considered having difficulties in changing their mentality and behaviour, and still seem to be reluctant to vocalize their views and stand for their rights, even if they are now increasingly more and more aware of them. This, naturally, applies to the majority of the population, whereas, there are many exceptions - prominent civic activists belonging to older generations who started and continue fighting for their causes and protecting the rights of certain groups of the population in Armenia and serving as inspiration for the younger generation of activists.

In the analysis of reasons behind the rise of civic activity, more specifically, the environmental civic activism in Armenia, Ishkanian (2013) arrives at similar conclusions, and besides the difference in the mentality and expectations of the soviet and post-soviet generations and the growing popularity of the social media sites among the younger generation, she also mentions a global dimension - the recent spike in global civic unrest in the world– Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring and civic movements in the former Soviet states – Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, etc., information on which has become accessible to Internet users in Armenia and could have inspired protests and opposition to the illegal actions of the governing elite and their impunity.

From 2007 onwards, more than 25 civic campaigns have been initiated in Armenia, mostly by young people in early 20-es to mid-30-es. The civic initiatives ranged from environmental campaigns and protests against mining companies or construction of boutiques in the green area zone in the centre of capital, to social, political, legal and human rights issues, including protests against the decisions to increase public transportation fee, change the legislation on paid maternity leave, change the social insurance system and increase the electricity tariff. The outcomes of the civic initiatives, naturally, varied: some were successful, some – unsuccessful, some were abandoned and some continue till present. Regardless of their outcomes, the civic initiatives have all raised public awareness about the issues they addressed, alerted the population to the shortcomings and flaws in the system and, as a result, contributed to making the government more vigilant and accountable for their actions.

Below is an overview of the major civic initiatives and that took place in Armenia within the previous five years and discussion of their results and impact.

*"Save Trchkan Waterfall" Initiative*

Trchkan waterfall is located on the river Chichkhan in the Northern Armenia, on the boarder of Lori and Shirak Marzes. Despite the fact that the waterfall had been included in the list of the protected water landmarks of the Republic of Armenia, in April 2010, the Government of Armenia issued a license to 'Robshin' Ltd. for building a hydroelectric power plant on Trchkan waterfall. As the news of construction work at the waterfall spread across the country, it alarmed many environmentalists and civic activists, who protested against the construction in front of the RA Ministry of Environment Protection and the RA Government. A civic initiative group/coalition named 'Save Trchkan Waterfall' (or 'Protect Trchkan Waterfall) has been formed by the concerned activists, soon joined or supported by numerous NGOs, local and international environmental organizations, including WWF (World Wild Fund for Nature) Armenia, journalists and simply active citizens who demanded halting the construction of the hydroelectric power plant on Trchkan waterfall, as it would result in irreversible damage to the waterfall and the river, and could engender the whole local ecosystem. The protests were widely covered by the local and national media, gradually gaining more and more support from citizens and organizations. The protesters also opened a Facebook group to raise awareness and coordinate their activities. More than 5000 supporters joined the group. As a response to the protesters, the RA Ministry of Environment Protection first attempted to offer a compromise, saying that the measured average flow of the waterfall was about 500 litres per second, and 'Robshin' Ltd. would only use the 'extra' water – whatever was above 500 litres per second, however, the attempt to further pursue this enterprise, which was considered by many as illegal and in breach of the RA Law on "Specially preserved natural areas", which states that "*economic activity that may deplete natural resources and destabilize the ecosystem, endanger plant and animal life, or damage scientific or cultural artifacts that should be protected is prohibited in nature preserve zones*" (http://armenianweekly.com/2011/11/30/the-saga-of-trchkan) sparked an outrage and multiplied the number of protesters and supporters of the campaign. More than 10.000 signatures were collected to petition the Government and demand saving the waterfall. 'Save Trchkan Waterfall' activists organized a camp–out near Trchkan waterfall, to obstruct the construction work and prevent operation of the heavy machinery that was already on the site. After weeks of protests and camp-outs on the site, 'Robshin' Ltd., bearing sizeable financial losses, had to halt the construction and take the machinery off the site.  The protesters, however, were not satisfied: they

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continued the campaign and demanded revoking the licence and declaring Trchkan waterfall as a 'nature preserve zone', so that no further attempts could be made to launch any economic activity endangering the waterfall and the river in the future. As a result of the campaign, the protests, petitions, and extensive media coverage, the civic activists won a victory - their demands were finally met: in November 2011, then Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan who had earlier himself joined the Facebook group "Save Trchkan Waterfall", called on the RA Minister of the Environmental Protection to officially put an end to any construction, and passed a decision to grant a special status of a fully preserved zone to Trchkan Waterfall.

> *"The "Protect Trchkan Waterfall" initiative was the chief voice advocating for the protection of the waterfall. The group consisted of over 100 activists, journalists, and locals. It was through their organization, coupled with cooperation by civil society representatives, that the events—demonstrations and camp-out—took place. Using Facebook, "Protect Trchkan Waterfall" successfully mobilized the community and ultimately saved the waterfall." - The Armenian Weekly* reports on November 30, 2011[37].

The success of this nation-wide campaign inspired many people – they felt that for once the voice of citizens was heard; the victory was celebrated by a concert and a renewed resolve to fight for environment protection and sustainable development of Armenia.

### *"Save Mashtots Park" Civic Initiative*

In February 2012, reports about construction of boutiques (kiosks) in the Mashtots Avenue Park in the capital city of Yerevan filled the Armenian online media and social sites. The citizens were shocked and furious over the Municipality's approval issued for cementing one of a few remaining green zones in the centre of the city to install there the boutiques that had been earlier dismantled from Abovyan street. The decision was taken without any prior discussion or consultation with the local community. Moreover, many citizens claimed that the decision was illegal, as by passing it, the Municipality put the interests of certain elite businessmen over the public. A group of civic activists called "We are the owners of our city" (translated into English also as "This city belongs to us") was formed to represent the interests of citizens and demand halting the installation of boutiques in Mashtots Park. The representatives of the civic group met

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[37] http://armenianweekly.com/2011/11/30/the-saga-of-trchkan (acessed September 24, 2015)

with the Mayor of Yerevan Taron Margaryan on February 14, 2012, and Yerevan city chief architect Narek Sargsyan- on February 15, to discuss the issue and demand clarification and the legal basis for the decision. After the meetings, the activists reported that they had not been provided with any legal justification for cementing the green zone and installing the boutiques in Mashtots Park. Committed to saving one of the few remaining green areas in the city from being used for construction of boutiques and cafes that had been mushrooming in every street and corner of the capital, eating up the green areas and parks, the group announced about their intention to organize a round-the-clock sit-in protest in the Park to physically obstruct the installation of the boutiques, and called on the like-minded citizens to join them for saving the green area. #SaveMashtotsPark (https://www.facebook.com/SaveMashtotsPark/timeline), #OccupyMashtots and other online platforms were created (e.g. www.organize-now.am) and used for coordinating the group's activities and providing up-to-date information to the activists and the general public on any new developments. On February 17, 2012, the Police came to the site and called on the activists to stop protesting and obstructing the installation work, as such an activity would be considered as public order offence and could lead to administrative charges. The activists, however, continued the sit-in in Mashtots Park and insisted that they were peacefully exercising their right to assembly and demonstration against an illegal decision and act that violated several articles in the urban planning legislation (www.hetq.am). As the sit-in continued, numerous clashes with the police, incidents of attempts by the latter to disperse the activists, and arrests of some of the protesters over administrative charges followed. The developments have been widely covered by the local media, mostly the opposition, as well as neutral/international. Many right-protective organizations and individuals/lawyers stood for the rights of the protesters, as well as the RA Ombudsman's Office mediated and argued that the peaceful protest did not violate the public order.

Meanwhile, more than 10.000 signatures were collected to petition the Mayor of Yerevan to stop the construction of the boutiques in the green area. In the absence of a response and a dialogue with the Municipality, the civic initiative group organized a Just and Independent Civic Court (Civic Tribunal) where they discussed the legal grounds for the construction of the boutiques in the green area of Mashtots Park  (IDHR, 2012; Wikipedia, 2013). The verdict passed by the Civic Court required the Municipality to dismantle the boutiques within 10 days, and improve and preserve the public park. The activists announced that if the Municipality would not carry out the

requirement of the verdict, they would do so by themselves. A group of older, mostly male citizens, who called themselves 'dismantling brigade' was formed to dismantle any installation put up by the construction group. The protests have been escalating and clashes between the protesters and construction workers became more frequent: there were also reports of several incidents when the protesters physically blocked the way of concrete-mixing trucks to prevent cementing the park. The sit-in in Mashtots Park continued for several weeks, with flash mobs, forums, concerts, and other cultural and sports events organized by the young protesters in the Park, as well as incidents of clashes with police who kept dispersing the activists and dismantling their tents.

As the Parliamentary elections were approaching, some of the opposition party leaders and members attempted to use the situation in their favour, by coming to the Park, pledging their support to the protesters, delivering speeches and campaigning for their party. However, the young activists kept distancing themselves from any political party and stressed repeatedly that their action was civic in nature, not political. The activists continued fighting for their rights and protesting against the illegal decision of the Municipality. The struggle became representative of the fight against broader issues plaguing the country – corruption, 'oligarchy' and the people "above the law" (Save Mashtots Park Movement, 2011, Wikipedia, 2014, etc.).

The issue was finally resolved during the visit of the President Serzh Sargsyan to Mashtots Park on May 1st, during his pre-election campaign. In a gesture that many dubbed as a pre-election PR stunt, the President ordered the Mayor, who was accompanying him during the visit, to dismantle the boutiques and improve the territory of Mashtots Park (e.g. Tert.am, May 02, 2012). Presiden Sargsyan's famous *"Taron, this is not pretty, dismantle them",* became a popular aphorism among the youth in the country, signifying the 'surrender' of the government and the victory of civic activists. The young activists courageously fought for their rights for many weeks, standing up to police and provocateurs, in heavy snow and rain, and won a victory. At the beginning of May, Yerevan Municipality issued a decree to dismantle any installed construction on the site and approved the plan and schedule for Mashtots Park improvement.

The Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (IDHR) Armenia, writes about Mashtots Park civic initiative:

> *"The struggle in Mashtots park united the civil society sphere within three months and*
> *soon developed into a much broader process than the mere preservation of the park;*

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*achievement of constitutional rights, creating a public space, protection of public property, a direct civic action... The struggle in Mashtots park is viewed [in the film] as a clash between two opposite and contradictory cultures- criminal-oligarchic culture dominating in Armenia and developing civic-legal culture. The struggle remained unfinished. Public space was preserved and improved, but illegal decision makers and implementers were not called to accountability..."* (IDHR 2013)

Indeed, the civic initiative had transformed from environmental campaign to a movement against corruption, favouritism, oligarchy and lack of rule of law. The victory, no matter how controversial, was earned and celebrated by the activists. Mashtots Park civic initiative is also considered to have given a rise to the movement of *'self-determined citizens'* in Armenia: during the protests and demonstrations, the activists had stated on numerous occasions that they did not belong to or wish to side with any political party, local or international organization, neither they sought any financial assistance/grants from any local or international NGO or fund; they characterized themselves simply as 'self-determined citizens' (slogans on demonstrators' posters read: *Time of Self-determined Citizens*) who were fighting for their rights and against the unlawful activities of the Municipality and the Government.

### *"I will not pay 150 dram" (or "100 Dram") Civic Initiative*

In July 2013, the RA Ministry of Transport passed a decision to increase the public transportation (mini-buses, buses) fare from 100 AMD[38] (20 US cents) to 150 AMD (32 cents), effective from July 20th. The news came after a series of price hikes in the country, including the price on natural gas and basic food items, and caused an outrage among the public. Especially the younger people – students were very vocal, demanding a justification for the 50% increase in the transportation fee. The Municipality presented a document with calculations, indicating that 1 passenger transportation cost was around 144 AMD, however, a third party calculation was requested by the civic activists, and the latter indicated 92.5 AMD for transportation of 1 passenger.

On July 19, a group of activists protested in front of Yerevan Municipality and, in the presence of the police, who outnumbered them, presented the results of the transportation fare analysis made by the third party to the Municipality officials, in an attempt to convince the latter to reverse the

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[38] Armenian Dram (1 AMD =500 USD)

decision. The Mayor's Office, however, refused to reconsider the decision to increase the fee. Protests grew immediately, particularly fuelled by the rumours that the public transportation lines (routes) belonged to oligarchs and the profits were shared with the Mayor Margaryan (The Armenian Weekly, July 23, 2013). Young people – students, NGO activists, civic society representatives, protested at the bus stops, holding posters and urging all the passengers at the bus to continue paying 100 AMD, instead of the newly established fare of 150 AMD. Some of the bus drivers were also supporting the protesters and continued taking only 100 AMD for transportation, however the activists made it clear that their protests were not against the bus drivers, but against he owners of the transportation lines who received all the gains.

As a sign of protest, many students were refusing to take buses and walked to their schools or universities, while those who had cars offered others to carpool, as well as went and drove in the streets till late evening, offering free pick-ups and rides to the people waiting on the bus stations.

> *"After our classes, we all go to make copies of posters saying "I'm paying only 100 drams", or "I will not pay 150 drams", and we are going from one bus stop to another in the city, spreading those posters and urging the citizens not to pay the new tariff."* (Author's interview with a civic activist, male, in early 20-es).

> *"After work, I join my friends who protest against the increase in the fare. Please, get me right- this is not about the 50 drams - I have already spent nearly my whole salary for this month only on posters and leaflets, which I spread at the bus stops, calling on the citizens not to be a sheep (showing a poster with a picture of a sheep) and not to pay 150 drams. They (referring to authorities) cannot do whatever comes to their minds; this increase is not justified at all. How can pensioners or students who receive meagre stipend pay so much for travelling in the city? They have to take into account the citizens' situation and their views when they are taking a decision affecting the population.* (Author's interview with a civic activist, female, in mid 20-es).

The civic initiative was clearly not about the 50 AMD, but about the fact that the citizens had been ignored in the decision-making, and nobody had consulted with the community or had given a warning about the possible increase. Moreover, many remember the pre-election campaign of the Mayor Taron Margaryan, mentioning that the public transportation fee would not be increasing in the future.

In addition to protesting in the streets, the activists tried to negotiate with the Municipality and the RA Ministry of Transportation, and suggested a number of changes to optimize the public transportation system. They also demanded better accountability from transportation companies and asked to involve the general public in decision-making on such critical issues as increase in the fare (e.g. PanArmenianNet, July 23, 2013). The negotiations and suggestions, however, remained largely unanswered.

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were widely used by the young activists to coordinate their routes for carpooling and exchange information on developments, post videos of the protests and encountered incidents. Some of the activists reported being approached by policemen in uniforms or civilian clothing, and warned not to stand at the bus stops, or reported cases when civilians followed them to their homes, allegedly, in an attempt to scare them. However, the young activists were adamant and continued the protests.

> *"Policemen in civilian clothing are following us – they want to scare us… they know all of us- the core group of activists, very well, they follow us, they know where we live, work... But we are not afraid of them, they cannot do anything - we know our rights and we are not violating any law. They have approached us for many times and asked to stop protesting and go away from the bus stop, then they followed us home late in the evening. Sometimes we call them our 'guards', as a joke. Armenia is a democratic country, and we have the right to stand for what we believe, we have the right to express our views and positions, and protest peacefully ".*

 (Author's interview with an activist, female, early 30-es).

The protests were widely covered by all the local mass media and attracted more and more people- hundreds of young people were joining the movement. The spirit of solidarity and civic activism among the young citizens that I witnessed during those days in Yerevan was truly inspiring. Most of the civic activists were well aware of their rights, and demanded accountability from the transportation companies and the Municipality, as well as their rightful place at the decision-making table. While it is true about the so-called core group of activists, who were a group of around 200 people, in their mid- to late twenties or early thirties, there were also some young people – mostly students in early twenties, for whom the initiative seemed to be just an act of rebellion or 'a cool thing to do' after University or College classes: they joined the protests and

campaigned enthusiastically, urging citizens to pay only 100 AMD for transportation, but were mostly unaware of the bigger picture and the underlying causes of the campaign, such as lack of accountability, transparency and citizen involvement in decision-making. Their involvement and bravado, nevertheless, fuelled the protests and extended its scope.

A special website www.freecar.am was created by the activists to coordinate citizens' carpooling in Yerevan and was rapidly growing in popularity.

In the light of the continuing and escalating protests, on the 6$^{th}$ day, the Mayor of Yerevan announced about cancelling the new tariff. The victory was widely celebrated across the country, and became known and referred to as 'The 3$^{rd}$ Victory" of civil society in Armenia (the first two being "Save Trchkan Waterfall" and Mashtots Park victories).


### *"I'm Against!" (Dem em! or Dem.am!) Civic Initiative*

At the end of 2013, the RA Government announced about introducing reforms in the social insurance system and putting in effect, from January 2014, a new law on Mandatory Social Insurance. The new law required the citizens born on or after 1974, in addition to other social security payments (taxes), to make mandatory transfers of 10% of their salaries to private insurance funds, selected by the RA Government, for the purposes of accumulating pension, which could be used by the citizens upon retirement, the age for which is currently set at 63 for both men and women in Armenia.

In the atmosphere of lack of trust to the government and the system as a whole, as well as lack of trust to the private companies approved by the state, the law, especially the 'mandatory' nature of it, caused uproar amongst the younger work-age population (40 and below) affected by the law, who organized demonstrations and rallies to protest against the proposed reform (e.g. azatutyun.am, March 22, 2014). Protesters, among whom was a large percentage of educated young people working in high-paying jobs in the IT, engineering, legal and other sectors in Armenia, opened a special web-page www.dem.am ("*I'm Against"* in Armenian) to coordinate their activities, post updates, collect signatures and petition the Government, requiring reconsideration of the law and introducing amendments to it with the purpose of changing the 'mandatory' component. The civic activists claimed that the new law was unconstitutional, as a number of provisions it contained were in breach of the RA Constitution.

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Several thousand citizens joined the demonstrations and rallies across the country, expressing their protest against the 'reform' that violated the country's basic law (e.g. Armenia.Now, March 22, 2014). The protests received an extensive coverage by the local media.

*Dem em!* civic movement seemed to be more organized than the previous civic initiatives and had concrete leaders; several names and faces figured frequently in the demonstrations, meetings and negotiations with authorities, discussion groups and media reports. Numerous interviews were broadcast with *Dem em!* leaders, who discussed the controversial law and argued against its provisions with lawyers and government representatives on the national TV, explaining the shortcomings and inadequacy of the proposed reform, urging the authorities to amend the law and calling on to the viewers to join the demonstrations. Facebook pages for general information and discussion groups have been created to keep the population informed and steer the debates and discussion of the proposals, as well as coordinate further actions of the group. The protesters applied to the RA Constitutional Court (CC), demanding recognition of the new law on Mandatory Pension unconstitutional, and held negotiations with then Prime-Minister Tigran Sargsyan, proposing amendments to the law.

Four parliamentary non-governing parties - Prosperous Armenia party, "Heritage", Armenian Revolutionary Federation (RFP) and Armenian national Congress (ANC), supported the protesters and filed a joint lawsuit to the Constitutional Court against the 'mandatory' provision of the new pension law. They also invited the leaders of *Dem em!* to attend a special parliamentary session to discuss amendments to the law, however, the latter refused, stating that there was no need for the special session. It is noteworthy, that the leaders of '*Dem em!* civic initiative emphasised repeatedly that they did not wish to *'cooperate'* with political parties. Arsen Manukyan, one of the leaders of *Dem em!* Initiative was quoted saying *"We will not cooperate, but work on amending the law"* (News.am, April 19, 2014).

On April 2, 2014, RA Constitutional Court (CC) declared a number of provisions in the new law on Mandatory Social Insurance as unconstitutional. Following the publication of the CC's ruling, the RA Government made some modifications in the law and drew up a document that allowed the citizens to refuse to pay the social insurance contributions till September 30 (2014), the term established by the Court for the Government to amend the law and bring it in accordance with the RA Constitution (e.g. ArmInfo, June 9, 2014). However, despite those developments, the financial and taxation authorities in the country continued requiring the employers to make the

additional payments from the employees' salaries to the private pension funds. Numerous cases of pressuring employees and not allowing them to refuse the payment of pension contributions have been reported throughout the country and were especially a commonplace in the public sector jobs. The demonstrations and protests continued with the *Dem em!* leaders organizing a March of Protest in Yerevan and urging those citizens who could  refuse the payment of social insurance without facing the threat of loosing their  jobs (the employers, in their turn, were reportedly pressured by the authorities), to do so and to sign a petition to the RA Government, announcing about their refusal to take part in the mandatory pension plan (ArmInfo, June 9, 2014). On April 16th (2014), *Dem em!* civic initiative addressed a letter to the President Serzh Sargsyan, asking him to intervene and make sure that the Government respects the RA Constitution, as well as the ruling of the RA Constitutional Court and makes the required amendments to the new law on pension funds (e.g. A1+, April 16, 2014).

In further developments, some amendments were introduced into the law, and while the wording '*Mandatory*' [social insurance contribution] was changed, the payment of 5 to 7% of the citizens' salaries to cumulative pension funds is still stipulated by the law, which, however, set different terms and dates for the beginning of the payment plans for employees of public and private sector establishments, as well as established different percentage of payment for different income groups.

Despite achieving a partial victory and effecting certain amendments in the new law on social insurance, *Dem em!* civic initiative activists continue their activity through negotiations with the RA Government over further amendments to the law, new lawsuits filed to the RA CC, interviews and televised debates of new ideas and proposals for making the pension reform better meet the interests and needs of the citizens.

### *"No To Plunder!" or "Electric Yerevan" Civic Initiative*

In May 2015, the Electric Networks of Armenia (ENA) CJSTC[39], which was acquired in 2006 by the Russian Inter RAO UES International, and was the holder of monopoly on electricity distribution in Armenia, applied to the Armenia's Public Service Regulatory Commission (PSRC) with a request to increase the electricity tariff by 40%, starting from August 1st, 2015. As a justification for the increase in the electricity tariff, ENA cited an investment of 102 million AMD

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[39] Closed Joint Stock Company

in the electricity supply network, its losses and accrued debt of 235 Million USD to the state, supply companies and banks (e.g. Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 21, 2015). The reports of the ENA's losses, however, aroused suspicions among the experts, as the company's financial statements indicated considerable profits in the revenues from Armenia (Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 12, 2015). Numerous reports surfaced in media, describing the luxurious mansions and cars the company had been renting out for its high-level management, in addition to paying them very high for the region salaries. It was also revealed that the company had been paying on an average 20% above the market price for all kinds of supplies - equipment, cables, etc. and 14% above the average for services of contractors (ibid.; RFE/RL June 24, 2015).

Amidst all the reports of misappropriation of funds and accusations of mismanagement and corruption presented to ENA and its CEO[40] Yevgeny Bibin, Armenia's PSRC's announcement, on June 17, of its approval of the increase in the electricity tariff by around 17% - from 42 to 49 AMD (10 US cents) for kilowatt/hour, effective from August 1, sparked widespread public protests in the country. This increase would be the 3rd since 2012, and would represent a 50% rise in the electricity tariff since then. It would also automatically lead to a chain reaction – spiking price on food, other goods and services, leading to further inflation and worsening of the situation of a large share of the population who are already struggling under the burden of rising food and utility prices, receiving inadequately low wages or pension.

The public dissatisfaction with the Government's inactivity and approval of the increase filled into a demonstration on June 22, when thousands of young people set off to march from the Liberty Square to the Presidential Office on Baghramyan Avenue, chanting "No To Plunder", referring to the planned 'robbery' from the population to cover for the money misappropriated by the Russian-managed company and its high-level supporters and oligarchs in Armenia (e.g. RFE/RL, June 24, 1015).

The young demonstrators staged a sit-in on Baghramyan Avenue, a main thoroughfare in the centre of the city, demanding reconsideration and cancellation of the decision on electricity price hike. They, however, were met by a large group of police who demanded they dispersed and accused them in public order violation (Hetq, June 26, 2015; RFE/RL June 24, 2015, etc.).

Despite the threats, the young people continued the demonstration on Baghramyan Avenue throughout the night, but faced a violent attack by the police in the early hours of June 23, when

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[40] Chief Executive Officer

they were brutally hit by water cannons, as the police attempted to disperse the demonstration. Young people and journalists covering the protests were beaten and dragged away by plain-clothed officers who appeared among the protesters wearing 'police' armbands. Around 200 activists were arrested, including some journalists, and their equipment – video cameras, smartphones, etc. were seized or smashed by the police.

Photos of young people being violently hit by water cannons on Baghramyan Avenue went viral in local and international mass media and social networking sites, and caused public uproar and fury over the disproportionally excessive measure taken against the peaceful demonstrators. The crackdown on the demonstrators was widely criticised by the opposition parties, international organizations and Embassies working in the country. Among others, Russian diplomats have been reported to express their concern regarding the situation and calling the authorities to make concessions and find "a compromise decision on issues raised by the demonstrators" (RFE/RL, June 26, 2015).

On June 24, several thousand more young people, many with their children, holding balloons and posters, took to the streets and went to Baghramyan Avenue to express their protest and support the "No To Plunder" civic initiative, also referred to as "Electric Yerevan", especially in international press (BBC, The Guardian, The New York Times, etc.). The number of demonstrators reached from an estimated 9.000 to more than 30.000. Facebook and Twitter feeds (#ElectricYerevan) were full of reports on the protest on Baghramyan Avenue, updates and warnings/advice to those who wished to join the protest. Thousands of young people were marching to Baghramyan Avenue, where the demonstrators had closed the traffic and used trash containers to build barricades to shield themselves from the riot police. The courage of the youth was truly impressive: some took the police crackdown with sense of humour and showed up wearing swim gear or holding posters reading *"You Water - We Grow!",* referring to the growing number of demonstrators joining the movement. *"They baptized a new generation of civic activists",* - was a popular phrase among citizens after the water cannot attack.

In the evening of June 23rd, some Deputies of the National Assembly, famous singers and actors, as well as representatives of civic society joined the demonstrators to make a 'life fence' – a human shield against the police, in order to prevent any possible violence.

Into the 4th day of sit-in protests, President Serzh Sargsyan invited the leaders of "No To Plunder" civic movement to the Presidential Office for negotiations, and asked them to stop the sit-in and

open Baghramyan Avenue for traffic. The young people, however, refused to negotiate, and simply reiterated their demands - to cancel the decision of electricity tariff increase, organize an audit of the financial reports of ENA to clarify the reasons for the accrued debt, and hold the responsible people accountable. The young people have also demanded investigation into the use of excessive force against the peaceful protesters.

During the demonstrations, because of the unprecedented number of young people taking part in the protests, there have been some attempts by certain mass media (e.g. Russia24, Sputnik, etc.) to present the movement as a growing colour revolution, another "Maidan", or a protest steered or funded by pro-western organizations to overthrow the pro-Russian government. Presenting the peaceful citizens- participants of the demonstration as an equipped crowd violating public order, and describing the apolitical demonstration as a US orchestrated attempt of a colour revolution in Armenia, a number of Russian mass media outlets and online newspapers discredited themselves among previously mostly pro-Russian population and deepened the growing public disillusionment with an 'important ally' in the region. Some opposition parties have also tried to stir up and steer the demonstration to their advantage, coming to Baghramyan Avenue and delivering speeches, however, any attempt to politicise the protest was stopped by the civic activists. The posters of activists stated: "*This is Not Maidan, This is Marshal Baghramyan*" (name of the street were protest was taking place), and any provocation among the protesters was dealt with immediately by reporting the provocateurs and banning them from the demonstration (The Armenian Weekly, June 25, 2015). Such cases were also reported on Facebook, so that the word reached all the protesters and they knew the provocateurs by faces.

On numerous occasions - in many interviews and press conferences, "No To Plunder" leaders and participants announced that they did not belong to any local or international organization – CSOs, NGOs, or political parties and organizations, neither they received or needed any funding from any organization. They stated that they were simply citizens who were protesting against the systemic corruption and demanding the RA Government to bring the charges of misappropriation and other violations in the ENA to a court for a fair trial, instead of covering up those crimes and making the population pay for them.

The sit-in on Baghramyan Avenue continued for fourteen days, with protesters demonstrating peacefully, singing and dancing to Armenian folk music, waving Armenian flags and chanting "*No To Plunder*" and *"We Are the Owners of This Country"* slogans. Media was full of photos of

young people setting to sleep on Baghramyan Avenue, swiping and cleaning the street in the early morning, dancing and singing during the day, and sharing food and water with the police, as a symbol of peace.

Evenings and overnight sit-ins were the most heated time for the demonstrators in their standoff with the riot police, as thousands of young people were joining the activists after work, leaving only late at night or in the morning, to go back to work. Although some employers were sympathetic with the protesters and allowed their employees to leave a little early or come in a little late, there were many reports of protesters loosing their jobs as a result of their participation in the demonstrations (Author's interview with a protester: female, mid-20es, who had been dismissed from her job, as her employer was against her participation in the demonstration).

Facebook feeds continued to be full of information regarding the protests, escalations, activist detentions, police or water cannon movement in the city, requests to bring water or snacks to the protesters on Baghramyan, and other updates. It is noteworthy, that several cafes in the centre of the city, in support of the civic movement, 'opened' their restrooms for the protesters, and provided them with free coffee, water and Wi-Fi, so that the civic activists could rest and take an advantage of the free Internet and post updates or photos/videos from the demonstration site.

Use of Internet for coordination of activities and posting updates during "No to Plunder" civic movement was truly unprecedented: a constant stream of updates from Baghramyan Avenue and negotiation of the activists' further steps on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social networking and sharing sites kept flowing and played a critical role in coordination of the protest-related activities and the struggle to resist the police and provocateurs.

The protests received a wide public resonance in the country, and spread also to other cities, such as Vanadzor, Gyumri, Charentsavan, etc., where youth protested in front of Municipalities or Regional Administration Offices. However, not having any mechanisms for achieving their objectives, other than the street protests, the young activists had to give up and start negotiation with the RA Government. The leaders of "No To Plunder" movement officially announced about their decision to discontinue the sit-in on Baghramyan Avenue and open the thoroughfare for traffic. The announcement came after several leaders of the civic initiative had been detained by the police, and certain concerns and rumours regarding pressure on the initiative leaders surfaced and started threading on Facebook and media, as well as incidents indicating some disorganization, disagreement and lack of coordination among the civic activists occurred, with

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some leaders of the protests and activists moving to the Liberty Square, others remaining on Baghramyan (e.g. News.am, September 9, 2015).

The leaders of "No To Plunder" movement held a press conference, announcing about their resolve to continue the protest, but by taking it from the streets to another platform - starting a dialogue with the RA Government. They also mentioned that the RA President offered them a compromise – he agreed to commission an international audit for ENA, as well as pledged to find sources of covering the burden of the higher electricity tariff for the population.

Having made significant 'waves' and local and international headlines, and having achieved certain concessions from the Government, 'Electric Yerevan' protest seemed to have exhausted itself and started to die out.

Some sources reported that the leader of 'No to Plunder' civic movement Vaghinak Shushanyan decided to quit his role, as he had to return to his studies (law student) and a new job, being the sole provider for his family. During his talks with journalists, Shushanyan had mentioned about being fired from his previous job, as the authorities and the police asked his former employer to dismiss him because of his involvement in the civic campaign, and that he could not afford to lose another job. The members of "No to Plunder' Civic Initiative, in their turn, announced that they 'understood' Vaghinak's motives for quitting the role of the leader, and that they would continue struggling for their cause by negotiating with the Government (e.g. azatutyun.am, August 28, 2015).

Besides agreeing to carry out an audit of ENA, the Government also announced that it would cover for a year the additional burden (7 dram difference per kilowatt) on the socially insecure families for use of up to 250 kilowatts of electricity per month, and hinted about possible nationalization of the ENA.

In September (2015), it became known that Inter RAO Holding had filed an application to the RA Government for selling 100% of ENA's shares to "Liormand Holding Limited", a company linked to a Russian businessman of Armenian origin - Samvel Karapetyan, owner of "Tashir Group" companies and a brother of Armenian Parliament deputy Karen Karapetyan (Armenian Times, September 18, 2015). However, the promised audit has not been concluded yet, nor any information on any findings has been made available to the public. Some experts suggest that the electricity price hike is unlikely to happen before the referendum on constitutional changes, planned for December 6, 2015, when the President Sargsyan hopes to strengthen his position by

pushing a comprehensive package of constitutional amendments to replace the currently semi-presidential system of government by a parliamentary one.

While it yet remains to be seen whether "Electric Yerevan" protests will resume again in case of the electricity price hike, will subside, or transform into something else, the civic initiative has certainly made a big impact on the Government's policy making and accountability culture, having challenged it and asserted the rightful role of regular citizens as important stakeholders in the decision-making process.

As in the previous civic initiatives that took place in Armenia over the recent years, the young people who took part in the protest were not representatives of any political party, local or international NGO or any other organization, they were participating in the demonstration simply as concerned, responsible, active and 'self-determined' citizens who knew about their rights and wanted to protect them, who took responsibility for their country and fought to make their homeland a better place to live, for themselves and their children. They were students and young professionals, many of them working in international organizations, CSOs, private sector, legal, IT and other companies.

Despite the pressures, detentions and threats, the young people continued the struggle, citing their right to freedom of speech, right to assembly and peaceful demonstrations.

Most of the protesters were mobilized by means of the social media – Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were instrumental, especially in "No to Plunder" or "Electric Yerevan" protests. The civic activists were 'equipped' by smart phones and cameras, ready to videotape or record any interaction with the police, provocateurs or journalists, and post them online for the whole world to see. The young generation of Armenians appears to be apt users of ICT, with good knowledge of the English language and a set of blogging, networking, i-reporting and i–journalistic skills, as testified by numerous 'twits', articles, video footage and photos from the demonstrations posted in blogs, social networking sites and international media.

Besides being a tool for citizen mobilization, coordination of activities and provision of updates and information from the demonstration site, Internet has assumed also the role of a 'weapon' protecting the citizens against any unlawful actions of the police or other representatives of authorities who attempted to intervene or threaten the protestors.

*"We feel protected because we have cameras on our phones and we all take videos and post them online for everybody in the whole world to see what is happening at the demonstration- it is a powerful weapon against any illegal action the authorities might be considering in order to scare us off and stop the protest"*, - a protestor on Baghramyan street, male, in mid 20-es.

*"At least on paper, Armenia is a democratic country and has reasonable laws, which are however, often disregarded by the representatives of authorities themselves. Videotaping our and our fellows' interactions with the police and officials who come to Baghramyan to talk to us, gives us a guarantee that in case we are mistreated, those who are responsible are going to answer for that… just as the whole world saw the pictures and videos of the police firing water cannons at the protestors, and now the Prosecutor office was made to launch an investigation into the use of excessive force that night."* – a protestor on Baghramyan Avenue, male, mid-30es.

Several videos of interviews and talks with public officials, including Ministers, Parliament Deputies and Head of Police, went viral and were watched, quoted and critiqued by the media and thousands of citizens. The ideas and phrases expressed in the conversations with the demonstrators in the videos and interviews had serious ramifications for the reputation and careers of the involved officials.

*"They cannot scare us", "We will not give up fighting for our rights", "We are the owners of this country", "We work and pay taxes, and we don't do anything illegal: we know the laws and we know our rights", "We want our children to live in a free and democratic country", "We are here for our children and our future", "They [the Government] cannon do whatever they wish, enough with robbing and squeezing out of regular citizens!"* - were some of the common ideas and comments expressed by the protestors on Baghramyan avenue.

An important difference in the protests and demonstrations in Armenia from those in other post-soviet countries (e.g. Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan or Moldova) was that the demonstrators did not fight against the ruling party or the regime *per se* - they did not want a revolution. The protesters were just asking the government to meet a specific demand, to do its job and protect the interests and

rights of its citizens, to function in a more transparent and accountable manner, and respect the rule of law, by holding responsible for any wrongdoings persons accountable for their actions.

Table 5 summarizes the major civic initiatives implemented over the recent five years in Armenia and outlines their outcome and impact.

*Table 5: Summary of the major civic initiatives implemented in Armenia from 2010-2015, their outcome and impact*

| N | Name of Civic Action/Initiative | Date | Main Issue(s) Addressed | Underlying Issues | Methods/ Tools Used | Status/ Outcome | Impact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Save Trchkan Waterfall | Sept. 2010 | Ecology/ Environment | Corruption, Favouritism, Lack of rule of law, Lack of accountability and transparency, Lack of community involvement in decision-making | - Community mobilization; -Demonstration - Protest in front of the RA Government Building, - Camp-out on the site, - Obstruction to construction work - Petition; - SNA use: Facebook group | Resolved/ Positive | Increased public awareness regarding environmental issues, lack of accountability, transparency and rule of law; Protection of community property, Protection of citizens' rights to assembly; |
| 2 | Mashtots Park | Feb. 2012 | Green Zones, Parks, Ecology | Corruption, Favouritism, Oligarchy, Lack of accountability, transparency and rule of law; Lack of community involvement in decision-making | -Community mobilization; -Demonstration, - Meetings with Mayor, Municipality representatives; - Round-the – clock sit-in in the site; -Obstruction to construction work; -Petition (10K signatures); -Civil Court; - SNA use- Facebook group, Twitter | Resolved/ Positive | Protection of public interest, Protection of community property; Protection of Constitutional rights |
| 3 | I Will Not Pay 150 Drams | July 2013 | Increase of public transportation fare | Lack of citizen participation in decision- | -Demonstration, -Rallies - Youth mobilization; | Resolved/ Positive | Protection of citizens' rights and interests, Increased |

| | | | | making, Lack of accountability and transparency | - Negotiations with Municipality; -Carpooling initiative; - SNA: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, www.freecar.am | | accountability, transparency and citizen involvement in decision-making |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Dem em! (I am Against!) | Dec. 2013 | Mandatory Social Insurance Payment/New Law | Lack of citizen consultation and involvement in decision-making; Violation of Constitutional Rights | -Demonstration, - Rallies, - Petition RA Government; - 'March of Protest'; - Negotiations with authorities; - Lawsuits to the RA Constitutional Court; - Letter to the RA President; -SNA use: Facebook, Twitter, www.dem.am | Continuing/ Partially positive | Protection of citizens' Constitutional Rights |
| 5 | No To Plunder, or Electric Yerevan | May 2015 | Increase in electricity tariff by 17% | Systemic corruption, Lack of accountability, transparency and rule of law; Failure of Government to Protect citizens' rights; Lack of citizen participation in decision-making on matters affecting their lives | -Mass protests, -Si-in on Baghramyan Avenue, -Negotiations with the RA President and Government; - SNA use: Facebook Twitter (#ElectricYerevan) YouTube, Articles, Blogs, etc. | Continuing/ Partially positive | Protection of civil and economic rights of citizens; Citizen participation in policy formation; Fight against corruption. |

*Source: Author's compilation*

### 4.5. Organization, Impact and Future of Civic Initiatives in Armenia

Analysis of the major civic initiatives in Armenia shows that they emerged around a group of like-minded young people who dared to express their dissent and dissatisfaction with a certain issue and were joined by other citizens who shared and supported their views. ICT and social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube played an important role in organization of the civic initiatives, mobilization of citizens and coordination of the activities in Armenia.

The civic initiatives did not have a single leader or an exclusive group of leaders that would dictate the course of actions to the other members, rather, natural leaders emerged during the campaigns: most often those with more education and knowledge on the matter or legal understanding of the issues, who could contribute to the cause and the negotiations/dialogue with the government, offered their ideas on further steps, and, in case of approval by their peers, volunteered to take an active part in the initiative.

> *"There are no bosses among the group of leaders, there is no system of subordination. We discuss everything together and do not take an action unless the majority agrees on it. Usually, leaders are those who are actively involved in the cause and are there for every step of the campaign, giving it their most. But, of course, everybody contributes to the extent of their capabilities and establishes their own boundaries…there is no single right way of contributing, some people do not come and physically participate in the protest or demonstration, but raise issues with government representatives, write articles, blogs, or legally defend the detained activists… we appreciate everybody's initiative and degree of involvedness."* – "No to Plunder" leader, civic activist, female, mid 30-es.

It is noteworthy, that there were numerous activists who claimed they were among the leaders of the previous civic initiatives, for instance, "Save Mashtots Park" or "Pay only 100 drams" initiatives, and now they were actively involved in 'Electric Yerevan' initiative. These young men and women appeared to be simply active citizens who were not afraid of voicing their dissatisfaction and contributing their time, skills, knowledge and other resources for causes they believed that mattered. This core group of civic activists are a few dozen of young people - well-educated and outspoken citizens, with connections and resources, who do not depend on the state for their salaries (not civil servants or employees of state agencies) and hence, cannot be

manipulated and pressured into stopping their activism for the sake of keeping their jobs. These young people represent various sectors, such as business, entertainment, non-governmental, entrepreneurial, etc., but emphasise their involvement in the civic initiatives solely in the personal capacity, and not as a member of any organization.

Most of the major civic movements that took place in the country over the recent five years were initiated in the capital Yerevan, with some civic campaigns finding their supporters and spreading to the other larger cities, such as Gyumri, Vanadzor, Dilijan, Charentsavan, etc.

The civic initiatives in Armenia followed a well-established route, typical of social movements: they emerged over a common concern or dissatisfaction, coalesced, escalated, either continued or already found their resolution - succeeded, failed, were repressed or co-opted, stalled, or finally, dissolved.

According to social movements theories (Tilly 1978, etc.), civic initiatives and movements are usually characterized as chaotic and, as a results of having no specific leadership, structure, vertical accountability or subordination - an agreed plan of action or an agenda, and are considered to be less effective in terms of achieving a more systematic, lasting and meaningful impact on policy-making and solution of broader issues. Tilly (1978), for instance, describes social movements as challengers with no access to decision-makers, which typically dissolve once such access has been gained.

As it has been demonstrated above, a number of civic initiatives undertaken in Armenia have achieved their objectives and, subsequently, dissolved. However, their success was mainly about a specific narrow issue they were addressing, such as protecting a waterfall, a green zone, or preventing increase in public transportation fare, etc., and not about completely resolving the underlying causes of the problems or finding a permanent solution to the given or similar issues. There is a consensus among the activists and experts (e.g. Ishkanian 2015b) that those civic initiatives had only localized and, therefore, rather little impact on the broader and deeper issues in the country, such as systemic corruption, lack of rule of law, accountability of the government, favouritism, patronage, unofficial monopoly, violation of citizens' rights, etc.

Nevertheless, without any doubt, the civic initiatives that took place in Armenia had a considerable role in raising public awareness regarding a number of issues and problems existing in the country. They also contributed to the increase of social capital, especially the 'bridging' and

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'linking' forms of it, by bringing together people of all walks of life and uniting them around common goals, as well as challenged the government and, at the very least, made the authorities more vigilant and careful about their decisions affecting the citizens and their interests.

A new culture of citizenship took roots in Armenia –young, well-educated and "self-determined" citizens, who self-mobilize, most often with the help of ICT, to protect their rights, make their voices and preferences heard, and push back when the state abuses its position and ignores the rights and interests of the citizens. Numerous flash mobs, public awareness campaigns regarding important social, economic, legal, environmental and cultural issues (e.g. gender-based selective abortion, maternity leave legislation, etc.), petitions and online lobby groups organized by the grassroots – young men and women in Armenia over the recent years, testify to the emergence of new forms and patterns of citizenship in the country.

### *"Bright Armenia" (Lusavor Hayastan) Civic Initiative: The Way Forward?*

Over the recent months, social media and online local newspapers and news channels have been buzzing about a creation of a new civic initiative dubbed "Bright Armenia" - *'Lusavor Hayastan'* in Armenian, which is said to be based on European values and model of governance, focusing on the ideas of liberty, human rights, tolerance and dignity (Bright Armenia[41]). The civic initiative founders, among whom is Edmon Marukyan, a lawyer and an independent (no partly affiliation) member of Parliament, Mane Tandilyan, a civic activist and one of "Dem em" leaders, and other young activists, many with Western education and work experience, call the young citizens to unite and be the change they want to see in the country. The civic initiative leaders, realizing that the political arena is the only place where they can *legitimately* make a meaningful and systemic change, have announced about their intention to turn the initiative into a political party in the nearest future. The founders of "Bright Armenia" have started campaigns across the country, visiting every region, larger cities and towns, and presenting their vision for the new European-model based country, and their political platform and agenda for development of a democratic and prosperous state. The civic initiative team has announced about their goal of breaking the existing in the country stereotype about politics, as being a dirty business, where only individuals with substantial financial capital can participate. They emphasise the importance of establishing strong institutions, which would keep in check the power of individuals, around which, essentially, the

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[41] https://www.facebook.com/BrightArmenia/?fref=nf&pnref=story, (accessed on November 27, 2015)

politics in Armenia has been based since 1991. They advocate for larger involvement of youth in politics and development of a fresh and healthy political culture in the country.

The creation of a new civic initiative, based on and promoting democratic principles and values, and supported by a large constituency in the face of the young, active and 'self-determined' citizens, who are determined to transform it into a political party with a formal structure, as envisaged by the RA Law on Political Parties, to be able to play according the 'rules of the game' and compete for power and a place at the decision-making table, could in theory be the next logical step in the saga of civic awakening and civic activism in Armenia. However, given the initial stage of establishment of "Bright Armenia", it is still very early to gauge about its possible success or failure, and its possible course and role in bringing the rising civic activism potential into the political sphere and contributing to addressing the democratization and development related challenges in Armenia.

The currently unfolding events in the country feature other civic initiatives and campaigns, some of which have also grown into political movements that oppose the current regime and challenge its 'methods of work'.

The results of the Constitutional Referendum (December 6, 2015) are still being questioned and protested by many such initiatives and organizations, some of which have recently come under attack of police and hired 'thick-necked men in civil clothing' (aravot.am, January 9, 2016). An activist from political oppositional group "New Armenia" was charged with (allegedly) physically assaulting police, and a young woman in early 20-es has been brutally attacked and beaten by a few men who had warned her 'to keep away and stop participating in protests". The regime's policy of threatening and prosecuting civic activists and political opponents has once again caused a popular revolt - many young people took to the streets with posters and started online groups (Facebook) in support of the activists and their right to free assembly and freedom of speech.

At the very least, the major civic initiatives and the victories that had been achieved as a result, have raised civic awareness of the population, especially that of the youth, and have inspired them to stand against the unlawful practices, to demand accountability from the government, and demand realization of their rights.

Judging by the current lively scene of civic campaigns and movements unfolding in Armenia – both online and offline (real-life), it is safe to suggest that civic initiatives, as a phenomenon, are there to stay and further develop and spread in the Armenian reality.

Self-determined citizens, equipped with the knowledge of laws and rights, as well as the tools and possibilities provided by the new technologies, continue demonstrating civic activism and initiating activities aimed at realization and protection of their and their fellow-citizens' civic, political, economic and other rights, and threatening or holding back their potential might not work out for the current regime. Acknowledging the presence and potential of the knowledgeable and responsible young generation of citizens and creating a climate of mutual respect and arena for cooperation for achievement of the country's democratization and development related goals, on the other hand, might be an effective strategy that would yield positive results and bring about long awaited changes and improvements in the political and economic areas and related transformations and reforms.

## *4.6. Conclusion*

This chapter has explored and presented the civic participation practice, forms, patterns, and its role and impact on the democratization and development outcomes in Armenia. The study of civic participation in Armenia involved research in 10 case study communities, including 2 urban and 8 rural, and an overview and analysis of the major civic initiatives implemented in the country during the recent five years (2010-2015).

Research across the Armenian communities has provided comprehensive information and insights regarding the practice, forms and patterns of civic participation in the country.

It has been found that civic participation encompassed an array of activities initiated and implemented by the community members on volunteer basis, with the aim of improvement of the community life and prospects.

The research and discussion of the results were guided by the following indicators of civic engagement, identified during the literature review: *volunteering, belonging to organization, accessing/sharing and exchanging information, including via ICT, voting in elections, political and civic action, including online political and civic activism* (community's participation in demonstrations, protests, campaigns, participation in meetings where community issues are

discussed, collaboration with the local self-governance bodies, other public, non-profit or private sector organizations, etc.), and *donation to charities and causes*.

The research has established that civic participation forms in the Armenian communities ranged from physical work with the purpose of helping a neighbor or fixing a common problem to participation in the decision-making regarding the issues affecting the community's life, setting priorities and working together with the local government and other actors – CSOs and private sector organizations in order to address and resolve the identified issues.

The following five categories summarize an array of civic activities most commonly reported and observed across the researched communities:

1) Physical work/labour;
2) Organization of cultural, sports and other events in the community;
3) Organization and/or participation of awareness-raising campaigns, etc.
4) Donation/organization and/or participation in fund-raising campaigns, drives, rallies, etc.
5) Participation in decision-making, collaboration with local or regional public, private and non-profit sector organizations for purposes of community problem solution or improvement of the economic outlook and opportunities of the community.

It should be mentioned that in order to qualify for classification under the title of 'civic', those activities have to be performed on volunteer basis, being driven by the desire and goal to make a contribution, as an individual or part of a group, for a common good or a positive change/development in the community.

However, the underlying motives for civic participation, as the study has revealed, can be multiple.

The following are among the most frequently mentioned incentives for civic engagement in the Armenian communities:

- Philanthropy/desire to help the community, neighbours, friends, relatives, etc.
- Self-fulfilment/increased self-esteem from the realization of one's own contribution to the common good and/or solution of a community problem;
- Self-advancement - gaining (or expectation of gaining) more experience, knowledge, skills, connections, etc. and improving career and future employment opportunities;
- Feeling of belonging;

- Spending free time.

Most common obstacles to civic participation mentioned during the primary research in the communities include the following:

- lack of free time and lack of money;
- unwillingness to engage in an activity with others/distrust
- sense of disillusionment and disempowerment/lack of confidence that participation would matter;
- health issues preventing from participation.

It has been found that although the most common manifestation of civic activism in the communities has been volunteering one's time and other resources for a common goal, for instance, for a community clean up, tree planting, repairing roads, helping in renovation of a school, kindergarten, house of culture, etc., or donating some money for a certain cause (most common ones among the reported causes were help to orphanage, socially vulnerable families of the community, help to orphanage children, etc.), in many of the communities civic participation has also been manifested as collaboration with the local self-governance bodies and involvement in decision-making regarding community's problems and priorities, cooperation with both the public and private sector organizations for solution of community issues, establishment of Small and medium-sized enterprises, private public partnerships, other organizations contributing to the local development of the community. The impact of those activities on the democratization and development outcomes of the communities, correspondingly, ranged from low or superficial– in case of contribution of physical labor and volunteering for helping in the community, organization of cultural or sports events, etc., to high or significant – in cases of participation in Community Council meetings, having a say in decision-making and policy or development plan formulation, and creation of possibilities for improvement of economic prospects of the community.

In addition to the discussion of the research and its results related to civic participation in the Armenian communities, the chapter has also provided an overview of the major civic initiatives and campaigns implemented in the country during the recent five years (from 2010-2015).

It has been discussed that the rise of civic initiatives/campaigns in Armenia has started from 2005-2007 with environmental causes at first, and afterwards, gradually gaining momentum and expanding to involve other issues belonging to legal, social, cultural, economic and political spheres. First victories achieved in civic campaigns, such as "Save Trchkan Waterfall", "Save Mashtots Park", "We are not going to pay 150 drams" and others, have inspired and further motivated the youth, who have been the main participants, initiators and participants of those campaigns, to become more active and 'self-determined', to stand for protection of their rights and demand transparency and accountability from the government, as well as demand fulfillment of the government's duties and responsibilities.

A summary of the major civic initiatives, their outcomes and impact on the situation with democracy and development in the country have been presented and discussed. While some of those initiatives have already achieved their goals and have exhausted themselves, others still have an on-going status. A number of new civic initiatives sparked in the country at the end of 2015 and beginning of 2016. Based on the evidence, it can be concluded that civic initiatives in Armenia are growing in their strength and number, and they gradually encompass a wider range of issues.

Although it has been acknowledged that most of the civic initiates have had a narrow/localized impact – addressing and/or solving a specific narrow issue, such as cancelling construction of boutiques in a green zone/park, cancelling the RA Ministry of Transport's decision on increase of the public transportation fee, postponing the spike in the electricity rate or other unpopular and undemocratically (without consulting all the stakeholder, including the citizens) made decisions, it has been argued that all of those initiates have highlighted the broader and deeper issues existing in the country - corruption, patronage, unfair practices, lack of rule of law, lack of transparency and accountability of the government, lack of citizen participation and involvement in decision-making, etc., and have considerably raised public-awareness regarding those matters.

It is suggested that this growing civic awakening in the country is due to the younger, civically more educated and legally more knowledgeable generation, and these civic initiatives and movements have a strong potential to gain more support among the population, in particular, the youth, and move from civic arena into political, with the view of acquiring the structure and legitimacy to partake in the processes of decision-making and policy formation, thereby, making a

stronger, more meaningful and deeper impact on the democratization and economic development goals and targets in Armenia.

# CHAPTER 5. DETERMINANTS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN ARMENIA, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES

## 5.1. Introduction

Based on the analysis of the findings of the study of civic participation in Armenia carried out within the framework of this work, this section presents and discusses the key determinants of civic participation, as identified during the community visits, interviews and discussions in the 10 case study communities across the country, as well as during other phases of this research, including the overview and analysis of the major civic initiatives implemented in Armenia during the previous five years, informal interviews with CSO representatives and civic activists in the country.

The research has revealed that there is a number of factors that play a decisive role in influencing the level and magnitude of civic participation, by either enabling and fostering it or, on the contrary, by impeding it. These factors or determinants have been provisionally divided into two groups: individual level determinants – the factors that reflect the individual qualities, characteristics or traits favorable or unfavorable for civic participation, and contextually conditioned determinants - the factors provided by the institutional, cultural, historical, educational, economic and other contexts or environments that have a strong effect on civic participation, its level and impact.

Among the key determinants, the chapter focuses and discusses in more detail those of social capital, civic education and use of ICT for civic participation. Small-scale primary research has been carried out to inform the discourse on the afore-mentioned determinants, and to capture and describe their peculiarities in the context of Armenia. The description of the research and its methods, as well as the research findings will be provided in separate sub-sections devoted to each of those three key determinants.

## 5.2. Individual Level Determinants

During the study of civic participation across the Armenian communities, the following individual level determinants have been identified as most frequently and significantly affecting the level and magnitude of civic engagement of the community members.

*Resources: Time, Money*

During the key informant interviews and focus group meetings in the communities, the most common obstacle to civic participation, mentioned by the residents, was *lack of time. Lack of money* was another related obstacle, as many residents mentioned, that if they had had sufficient resources or a secure employment, they would have not been so concerned about making money to make both ends meet and would have, instead, spent more time participating in the community affairs, volunteering or meeting with various actors/organizations to solve a problem in the community. Money was also mentioned as a decisive factor in the discussion of the possibility of community contributions for various construction and repair needs in the towns and villages.

Many respondents mentioned lack of time and money for travelling, meeting with various officials and companies for the purposes of solving community problems.

> *"How do you think we can go and participate in the Community Council or any other meeting, if we need to take care of obtaining our daily bread – the cattle, agriculture and other urgent jobs and needs keep us busy all day long, and, yet, making both ends meet is still impossible…",* - male, over 50, community G1.

Having a full-time job or occupation to provide for their families, middle-aged men and women in the communities, especially the urban or larger rural ones, found it very difficult to make some time in their busy schedules for regular participation in civic activities or meetings with the community leaders and neighbours. Women, as traditional bearers of the burden of household chores in Armenia, appeared to be particularly vulnerable.

> *"I would love to participate in meetings or civic actions, or occasional seminars that local or international organizations conduct in our community, but unfortunately, I don't have time for all that, I work hard to provide for my family…how can I leave all the household work and go out to sit at a seminar or a meeting ?",* – female, mid 40-es, community D (from a conversation in front of her house, when I was inviting her to take part in the focus group meeting).

*Individual Characteristics*

The research revealed that a decisive factor in civic activism was community members' personality and traits. More outgoing, energetic, curious people with better communication,

negotiation, time-management, team-working and organizational skills appeared to be more actively and productively involved in the community affairs.

*Education, Social Capital (individual level), access to ICT and ICT use skills*

The research indicates that the level of community residents' knowledge about their rights on one hand, and functions of the local, regional and national government bodies – on the other hand, as well as possessing general knowledge of the legal framework in the country, played a decisive role in the community members' potential and success rate in initiating and solving community problems.

> *"Many people in our village did not know about citizens' right to access the community budget and make proposals for amending it, and they were very surprised to find out about it, when I suggested the community and the Mayor to add a special budget line for solving an important for the community issue, instead of something that could have waited till later",* - male, in 30-es, community A2.

In general, residents who were more knowledgeable about the legal framework or had information on various development opportunities for the village/town appeared to be more actively involved in rising in addressing community issues. They also appeared eager to share their knowledge with the community:

> *"After our participation in seminars and courses organized, for example, by AED or Counterpart International, we brought back all the material and brochures that we had received, and organized seminars for our community, to pass on the knowledge and information we had received about community action planning, RA legislation on local self-governance, human rights, gender equality and other subjects, relevant to the issues we have in the village. As a result of increasing community's awareness and competency on a number of issues, we were able to unite our efforts and implement some important initiatives that improved the life of our village residents",* - female, mid-30es, community K.

Social Capital, as measured by the level of trust, cooperation, networks and connections of the community members, has been found to be an important determinant of civic activism in the communities.

Reflecting the difference in the availability of social capital, based on the observation, focus group meetings and key informant interview findings, in some communities (3 out of 10) the residents appeared to be more reserved, less friendly and somewhat distrustful to each other. The analysis of the collected information revealed that the residents of these communities cooperated less, volunteered less, donated less, organized less cultural and sports events and were not very well informed about each others' issues and problems.

In contrast to this, in the other communities, the residents appeared to be friendlier, more open, eager to discuss their issues, projects, achievements, and as the research demonstrated, they had implemented more community initiatives and projects together. In 2 out of these 7 communities, the residents more frequently cooperated with the Mayor and the Community Council and solved more problems. The residents in these 2 communities appeared to be more active and better informed about the community issues, development plan and the budget.

A more detailed analysis of the social capital, its availability and types, as well as its relation with civic participation in the Armenian communities is provided in the section 5.4 of this chapter.

Access to ICT, as well as possessing adequate computer and Internet skills was another important determinant of civic participation in the communities. Residents, who had regular access to Internet and could use it to receive information or news, network or communicate with some agencies, had an opportunity to be more civically active, if they wished to. Examples of this were community members who volunteered to create a website of their town or village, and/or post information about the community needs, projects, upcoming events, or organize online campaigns to raise money for solving a community problem.

ICT access and ICT use skills played an important role also in networking and collaboration of the community with the neighbouring villages and towns, the regional centre and the capital.

In some of the communities where youth clubs or community action centres were established within the USAID or GIZ funded projects, the community indicated having a computer connected to Internet, which they used for the purposes of accessing and exchanging information, communicating and networking with their peers – youth clubs or action centres in other communities involved in the project.

Access to Internet played an important role in *'bringing new projects and opportunities'* to the community. Writing emails to the officials representing national and regional governments and

other state agencies for solution of community problems or appealing a decision via e-mail communication/request was also mentioned at the focus group meetings and interviews.

*Age*

The research revealed that younger people were more actively involved in civic activism across the Armenian communities. Students and young people who did not have full-time jobs had more free time to contribute to solution of community issues, participation in meetings and seminars, and volunteering to help their neighbours or fix a common problem in the community.

Another decisive factor was the civic education classes the younger generation had a chance to take at school, where they learnt about the basics of a democratic state and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

The younger generation appeared to have a bolder and more active, 'demanding' attitude towards the community leaders and authorities, and in general, spoke the 'language of' *citizen rights* and *responsibilities of the local government.* Furthermore, they spoke from the position of '*owners of the community and the country',* as they have stressed for many times during the focus group meetings. Whereas the attitude of the representatives of older generation was more passive and 'dependent' on the community leaders, from whom they expected the solution of their problems.

Another factor contributing to civic activism of the youth was their widespread and adept use of ICT by means of which they reported accessing and sharing information, taking part in online campaigns, petitions, or donating to causes. Computer and Internet use skills, paired with at least moderate knowledge of the English language, opened new horizons for the youth, who could now access online various kind of information and resources benefiting their communities.

Lack of ICT and computer skills was another obstacle to civic activism for the representatives of older generations. This barrier was particularly challenging in case of some community leaders. Lack of (high) education, computer and Internet skills has been a serious issue for the leaders of many rural and small urban communities for many years now, and it has significantly affected their performance and productivity, reflecting on the community and its development level.

*Agency: Mayor's personality and attitude, level of cooperation with community and other organizations*

Community leader's personality and character (professionalism, activeness, open-mindedness, willingness to collaborate, etc.), education and skills, including computer literacy and ability to access information and announcements on various projects, complete and submit application forms, as well as the social capital – network and connections – at his/her disposal, all appeared to play an important role in the community's activeness and development progress.

Respondents in the community A2, reported:

> *"Our Mayor is a young and energetic man, he is very active in all kinds of projects and programmes aimed at development of the community. Our community has been cooperating with a number of international organizations, we have a community centre where anybody can come and initiate a project or propose a plan for any improvement in the community".*

> *"Our Mayor cooperates also with local and regional NGOs, and is open to any new initiative that would bring a positive change in the community"* – was another respondent's testimony regarding the Mayor's cooperation.

Due to residents' involvement in the solution of community problems, A2 boasted a 100% tax collection, which is the main source for formation of the community budget.

In contrast to this, tax collection and community budget deficit were pressing issues for a number of communities in the sample. Because of the widespread unemployment and people's inability to monetize their scarce produce for a number of reasons (e.g. remoteness of a market, high preservation and transportation costs, etc.), many community residents were not able to pay the land and property tax, and therefore, the community had very limited budget for any improvement or problem solution.

The community A2 was rather a fortunate exception, which was also due to having a major employer in the community – mining and processing plant, which has been an important asset for the community, providing employment opportunities for the residents and keeping the population in the town.

The research showed that Mayor's attitude and willingness to cooperate with the community in identification of the priorities and solution of the problems was an important determinant of civic participation. While in some communities young, energetic, well-educated Mayors with working connections in the regional and national government, and other international organizations, had

created an enabling environment for community's civic participation, and, at the very least had attempted to encourage community's involvement in the volunteering activities and fixing community issues, Mayors in other communities did very little or nothing to cooperate with or engage the community in the solution of the common problems. Typically, those Mayors belonged to older generation, had less formal and informal education, less strategic connections outside the community, and, as the key informant interviews revealed, they were either occupied with a private business in or outside the community, paid very little attention to the community issues and discouraged any initiative by the residents, or were simply passive, unprofessional and reluctant to do their job. In these communities, the residents had very minimal or no access to any decision-making, and in the best-case scenario, they were simply self-mobilizing and self-organizing to solve some issue in the community by volunteering their time and skills to perform physical work (improving roads, fixing a bridge, carrying out minor repairs in the village, etc.).

## 5.3. Contextual Level Determinants

The research has demonstrated that a number of contextually conditioned factors have had a strong effect on the level of civic participation and, correspondingly, on the democratization and economic development outcomes in the communities across Armenia.

Among these factors are historical path and socio-economic development level of the communities, institutional context – the quality and capacity of the local and regional institutions, the quality and capacity of civil society organizations and actors, stocks and types of available social capital, level of civic or democratic education of the citizens, capacity building and technical assistance provided by international organizations, infrastructure, access to ICT, etc.

The following sections provide an overview of the key contextual level determinants of civic participation in the country.

### Institutional context

As discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation, the quality and capacity of institutions has a significant role for democratization and economic development outlooks of a locality. Transparent, accountable, responsive and otherwise democratic institutions create an enabling environment for citizen participation and foster creation of 'inclusive' economic institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012) that foster economic growth and development of the communities.

The research into the institutional context in the Armenian communities confirmed this proposition and clearly demonstrated the significance of the role of institutions. As a result of the research, it has been found out that most of the local governments lacked capacity and democratic qualities, including openness to the communities they are called to serve, accountability and transparency. In many communities across the country, the local self-governance bodies-Municipalities and community councils did not function or perform their duties properly. Such basic provisions and requirements of the RA Law (Constitution (1995), Law on Local Self-Governance (2006)) as provision of information on the community budget and the community development plan to the citizens, holding regular community council meetings and discussions with the residents on the community needs and priorities, organization and provision of basic services (e.g. garbage collection, road repair, proper maintenance of kindergartens, schools, etc.) have not been met or were lacking in a number of the researched communities. Some of the Municipalities, especially those in smaller rural communities, were lacking proper workspace and equipment (computers, printers, furniture, office for community council members, etc.), as well as education, work ethics and professionalism of some community leaders appeared to be rather inadequate to their position and assumed responsibilities.

*Civil Society Characteristics and Capacity*

The role and virtues of a strong and vibrant civil society for achievement of democratization and economic growth targets cannot be overstated (see Chapter 1). As a new democracy, Armenian civil society started developing after its independence and, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, facing numerous challenges, such as inflexible legal framework, lack of professionalism and capacity, etc., is often referred to as 'weak' or 'under-developed'.

The research in Armenia has demonstrated that the rather limited number of CSOs available in the rural and smaller urban communities across the country, indeed, in many cases, lacked capacity and resources for meaningful participation. The functioning NGOs were mostly dependent on donor money and availability of funding for a certain type of projects. The CBOs, which, as it has been already mentioned, are a relatively new type of organization in the country, greatly differed in their quality and capacity to act. The active CBOs – not registered grassroots, created in the communities most often within a framework of an international project, have been found to be quite active in some cases, and not very active – in others. A decisive factor was support and

acceptance of the CBOs by the community residents and the community leaders – local self-government body, as well as the civic/democratic knowledge the CBO leaders possessed and were able to successfully apply in their activities and projects. CBOs, created by international organizations in some communities were not active, lacked civic knowledge and other resources, as well as support of the community.

*Infrastructure and Socio- Economic Outlook*

The research has demonstrated that the communities that were closer to the regional centers and the capital, and, consequently, were closer to or used the main roads of the country, were more active and more involved in various projects and initiatives, whereas the communities that were located farther from the main towns and roads were less active and less involved in projects or activities. Availability of private businesses and employment opportunities in the communities has also been found to affect the level of civic activism of the residents. The communities, where socio-economic conditions were better as a result of having well-established private sector businesses (e.g. community A3 - a mine-processing plant, diary plant, etc.) or other major employers in the proximity, the residents appeared to be more actively involved in the community affairs and various projects, perhaps because they felt more secure and not overburdened by the question as to where and how obtain their daily bread, as the residents in other communities with no businesses or economic prospects.

*International Development Assistance (Capacity Building)*

6 out of the 10 sampled communities have received some assistance from international donors (USAID, GIZ or a EU project), and around half of the communities had a facility equipped with some office furniture and a computer, received within the framework on an international project (AED/USAID, Counterpart International/USAID, EU TACIS logos were the most frequently seen ones). In contrast, there were some rural municipalities, where there was only one computer – for shared use by the Village Mayor and the Municipality accountant.

In general, community's involvement in an international project was viewed by the residents as an advantage for the community and was mostly ascribed to the networking skills of the Mayor and the willingness of the latter to cooperate with local or international organizations, prepare documents and apply for *'bringing projects'* to the community. Due to participation in international projects, in 4 communities out of 10, there was some kind of a youth club or a

community action centre established, and the community members have benefited from participation in seminars and trainings, including those held in the capital Yerevan and abroad. This factor appeared to have had a crucial impact on the overall civic activism and civic involvement in the community.

During the focus group meetings, the residents of the communities collaborating with international organizations testified to the usefulness of the latter and the benefits that cooperation had yielded for the community.

> *"At first, we were very sceptical of the aid offered by the international organizations – the projects were mainly offering some computers, printers and furniture for a community action centre, which our community had to provide, and technical support- seminars and trainings for the community members. The community was first reluctant to participate in those seminars, considering them even offensive, as back then we thought we knew everything and did not need anybody from the capital to come and teach us. Mostly the youth took part in those seminars and trainings. But after some period of time, we saw how knowledgeable and active these young people have become – they started meeting with the community leaders, proposing various projects and improvements in the community, cooperated with many NGOs and other organizations from the regional centre and the capital, volunteered a lot for the community."* (male, mid-40-es, community K).

The research revealed that the capacity building efforts of the international organizations played a decisive role in the democratic education and engagement of the young people in the communities. Besides the knowledge and skills acquired for solution of community problems, the young people also made many new acquaintances and friends, as a result, increasing their social capital. Especially linking social capital has been found to be beneficial for the communities, as they received information and opportunities for solution of some of their problems from various organizations, including regional and international NGOs and other organizations the community youth visited during various seminars and study tours.

A focus group respondent from A3 noted:

> *"My nephew was among the young people who took part in the seminars and trainings organized in our community by AED, and later, by Counterpart International. He also*

*took part in a study tour abroad and in a number of trainings in Yerevan. He has come up with many initiatives for improvement of our community since then – he cooperated with the community council, Marzpetaran* (regional administration)*, other organizations. Due to his activeness and involvement in the community issues he made many acquaintances, and recently he was offered a job at a Yerevan-based NGO, which is very inspiring for us-he is still helping our community as he visits us every weekend and brings fresh news and information for more projects and development opportunities our community can apply for and participate".*

The research showed that in the communities where international organizations provided democracy and governance assistance (capacity building, etc.) and had some presence, the residents had a better idea of civic participation and used a specific language and terms, *'civic initiatives' ("kaghakatsiakan nakhadzernutyun")*, being the most frequently used term, as opposed to the communities with no democracy and governance assistance programs. Residents in the latter used '*civic action' ("kaghakatsiakan aktsia")* phrase when referring to any volunteering action taken by them for solution of a community issue.

It is also noteworthy, that the residents in the communities that received capacity building and technical assistance from international organizations were more knowledgeable about their responsibilities and duties as of citizens, as well as about their rights, such as, for instance, the right to participate in the community council meetings, to request information on the community budget and to organize meetings for discussion of community priorities, issues and methods of addressing them. The residents in these communities were more civically active and more engaged in the community affairs.

Based on the characteristics that were found to affect the level of civic activism in the communities under research, a general typology has been built to attempt a more visual presentation of the differences between the provisionally called *civically active* and *civically inactive* communities.

Table 6 below presents the main general characteristics of those communities.

*Table 6: Typology of Communities: Civically Active vs. Civically Inactive*

| Characteristics of the Communities with Higher Level of Civic Activism | Characteristics of Communities with Lower Level of Civic Activism |
|---|---|
| - Urban or larger rural;<br>- Better socio-economic and housing conditions;<br>- Larger number of young people living in the community;<br>- Proximity to the regional centre or the capital;<br>- Proximity to the main (interstate or national) road;<br>- Bigger employment opportunities (public and private establishments, businesses, service sector or other companies, etc.);<br>- Community leader's figure: agency capacity, professionalism, positive personality (active, energetic, involved, caring, etc.), possessing higher level of human and social capital;<br>- Assistance from international organizations, especially projects promoting democracy and governance (capacity building and technical assistance);<br>- Higher level of bonding social capital: higher level of trust in the community, volunteering, working together to address a common issue, organization of numerous community events, celebrations, etc.;<br>- Higher level of linking social capital-connections and collaboration with local and international CSOs, other | - Smaller rural;<br>- Bad socio-economic and housing conditions;<br>- Smaller number of young people living in the community as a result of out-migration for study or employment purposes<br>- Remoteness from the regional centre or the capital;<br>- Remoteness from the main (interstate or national) road;<br>- Very limited employment opportunities, no or limited number of public and private establishments, businesses or companies<br>- Community leader's figure: lacking agency, inactive, unprofessional, uncooperative, etc., possessing lower level of human and social capital;<br>- No assistance from international organizations, especially those promoting democracy and good governance;<br>- Low level of boding social capital in the community: low level of trust to neighbours, less cooperation, volunteering and helping each other, organization of less community events, celebrations;<br>- Low level of linking social capital - limited networking and collaboration with local and international CSOs, other communities, regional centres, businesses, etc.<br>- Poor Internet coverage and restricted |

| | |
|---|---|
| communities, regional centres, businesses, etc.<br>- Good Internet coverage and availability of means to access Internet (smart phones, laptops, PCs). | means to access Internet (limited number of smart phone, laptop and PC owners). |

Given the importance of social capital, civic education and ICT use for civic participation that has been widely confirmed during the primary research in the communities, the following sub-sections provide comprehensive information on those important determinants and their relation with civic participation in the context of Armenia.

## 5.3.1. Social Capital in Armenia

To add to the body of knowledge on stocks and types of available social capital in the Armenian communities, the following measures, as suggested by the leading researchers in the area of social capital (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones and Woolcock, 2006), have been used to gain insights and guide the discussion on social capital in the case study communities:

(1) Group membership,

(2) Trust and solidarity,

(3) Collective action,

(4) Information and communication,

(5) Inclusion and empowerment,

(6) Agency capacity of the community leader.

While certain aspects of the above mentioned issues have been already covered in the earlier parts of discussion on the determinants of civic participation in the communities, the following section highlights and summarizes the key findings regarding each of the above-mentioned measures or proxies of social capital.

*(1) Group membership*

The research revealed that group membership in the communities was rather low, especially in the smaller rural communities. The urban communities reported having 1-4 registered NGOs, and in general, more people indicated belonging to a group/organization.  In the rural communities, there

were only two that reported having a registered NGO, however, the latter were said to be inactive, because of the lack of funding at the time of the research. 5 communities out of 10 had some kind of an active organization – a youth club (2) a community center/committee (2) and a youth union (1). While in 4 out of the 5 communities it was reported that these organizations (CBOs) were established within the framework of an international project, they were described as operational and independent from that organization, and the focus group meeting participants in those communities were confident that those CBO would continue operating after the international donor's (GIZ, and USAID funded Counterpart International) withdrawal from the community. In one of the communities, focus group members reported having a youth union/club that was established by the community youth without any external influence (not the local government or an international organization).

Community members in the rural communities also reported belonging to self-help or self-organized groups that were engaged in a certain type of agricultural work together, benefiting each member of the group on a rotation basis.

In 9 out of 10 communities there were self-organized groups – with a schedule of the people who were responsible for taking the cattle to the pastures and bringing it back.

These groups were created by the community residents, based on the need for self-help or solution of a certain common issue with the help of the community, and at minimum, indicated availability of boding type of social capital.

In the urban communities, the members of the organizations - NGOs or CBOs reported collaboration with other CBOs and/or NGOs inside and outside their community, which is indicative of bridging/linking type of social capital.

*(2) Trust and solidarity*

The level of trust and solidarity in the case study communities varied greatly, but even in the most 'passive' communities with no formal organizations or grassroots groups present, and with only a few cases of reported 'civic actions' (mostly contribution of physical labour and helping a neighbour), a certain level of trust and solidarity among the community members was observed. In those communities, the members having similar issues/problems reported self-organizing for helping each other on rotation basis, which indicates availability of a certain level of trust, and particularly, the boding type of social capital.

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An interesting 'case' of trust was observed in most of the urban and all the rural communities – the owners of small grocery shops, and in some cases of other small businesses, were providing goods/services to the community members in credit, i.e. people did not immediately pay for the groceries and services; their names were put down on a list with indication of the amount of money their owed, for later payment.

Shop owners in a number of communities showed me notebooks with long lists of names of the community members who regularly 'bought' basic food items form their shops and promised to pay for them later, when they get money – receive pension, benefit, salary, remittances form family members working abroad, money from the sale of their produce, cattle, etc. The shop owners indicated that the community residents mostly paid their debts as soon as they had the money, but noted, that in some cases they had to wait for months or even years for a particular 'customer' to pay their debt. It is suggested that this self-established mechanism of trade worked in those communities or neighbourhoods, as people knew and trusted each other.

> *"If I don't 'sell' the groceries in credit, I will have no customers. So, I have to invest some money first, and then wait for a long time to get paid back, and see if there is any profit left for me"* – a shop owner, male, mid 40-es, community M.

> *"If I don't give goods in credit, I will have to close down the shop... at least now the residents pay when they get cash – when they receive money from their families/relatives working abroad or sell their produce",* a female, 50-es, community G.

All the cases of self-help and self-organized groups in the communities are based on trust and solidarity, which is indicative of availability of social capital stock, in particular, the bonding type of it.

*(3) Collective Action*

In most of the communities, especially in those with a CBO, the residents reported numerous 'civic initiatives' or 'civic actions', implemented in the community – cleanups, garbage collection, awareness–raising campaigns (youth was reported to have campaigned with posters regarding environmental issues), working together to improve roads, repair a school, open a kindergarten, solve the transportation problem, etc. All these collective actions testify about availability of social capital in the communities. Whereas in cases when the community members

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resolved an issue in cooperation with the local government and other organizations in the community – for instance, in the case of the earlier described solution of transportation issue in the community T, or, based on the need of the community, opening another kindergarten in A2, it can be suggested that bridging/linking social capital (links and connections with other groups/communities, businesses, public agencies and other structures) was especially instrumental in implementation of those initiatives.

During the focus group meetings, it was also indicated, that the citizens involved in collective action have increased their own network due to those initiatives, and gained more benefits of personal nature, such as improved career opportunities, as well as of collective nature - by establishing new connections that led to more projects and funding for the solution of community issues.

The afore-mentioned cases indicate that the relationship between social capital and civic engagement can be mutually-reinforcing, as, based on the empirical evidence, on one hand, availability of social capital (trust, norms of solidarity and networks, connections) resulted in civic participation, and on the other hand, civic participation itself has increased the stocks of social capital (both at the individual and community level) and resulted in benefits, therefore, it is suggested that this evidence supports Van Deth's (2008) discussion of the possibility of a reverse direction in the causality between social capital and civic engagement.

*(4) Information and Communication*

Access to and exchange of information has proved to be an important factor of civic activism in the communities. Many communities reported about learning new information and sharing it with the fellow-citizens, as well as learning about new possibilities for community development – announcement of new projects, new organizations with whom the community could collaborate, etc., and sharing the knowledge with the local self-governance bodies and the community, in order to cooperate together and to seize that opportunity.

In the communities where more information was posted on the Municipality posters or boards/walls, and the community members had access to the development plan and the community budget, have had discussed their priorities with each other and raised issues during the

meetings with the Community Council or the Mayors, the residents appeared to be better organized and more supportive of each other and their common goals.

Accessing information and sharing it within the group or among different groups/actors existing in the community indicates availability of social capital - the bonding and bridging/linking type of it respectively.

*(5) Inclusion and Empowerment*

The research revealed that the communities where the active group/CBO or the Mayor were able to involve all the residents who expressed a wish to join in the collective action, the impact of the latter was more impressive. There have been a variety of examples of civic initiatives that involved the whole community, for instance, fund-raising; clothes/toys drive for the orphanage children, a joint solution of a community problem, such as transpiration or potable water pipe repair, school repair, establishment of a library in the house of culture, and multiple other examples. Uniting all the community members together around those initiatives – youth, adults, elders, men and women alike, has undoubtedly increased the success and impact of those projects, as well as empowered the community to make a change. The communities where the Mayors encouraged and empowered the residents to access, discuss and propose changes in the community development plan, and have afterwards followed on their commitment - introduced and implemented the suggested initiatives, the communities were more active, supportive of each other and appeared to be better off. These inclusive and empowering attitudes varied in different communities, indicating ranging from low to high stocks of social capital.

*(6) Agency of the Community Leader*

The agency of the community leaders - Mayors, as already mentioned, proved to be an important determinant of civic participation in the case study communities. It has been already indicated, that in some communities Mayors were better educated, more active, more open to cooperation with the citizens and groups. In these communities, bigger numbers of civic initiatives and implemented projects have been reported, contributing to solution of more community problems and improvement of the socio-economic situation. Evidence from these communities suggests that those Mayors possessed more stocks of social capital (at individual level), as in many cases the mayors were credited by using their personal networks/connections for establishing new collaborations and attracting projects to the community.

Whereas in the communities where the Mayors did not wish to involve the residents in the solution of community issues (i.e. did not wish to share their control or power) or were reluctant to cooperate, there was less observed and registered civic activity, less (or no) CBOs, and at maximum, one or two self-help groups. This indicates that the level of social capital was rather low in those communities, in particular, it is suggested that the stock of bridging/linking type of social capital has been rather low.

Thus, it can be inferred that the research indicated availability of social capital in the Armenian communities, in particular, boding social capital was found to be present in all the case study communities, at least at a certain level, including also in the 'civically inactive' or less active ones.

As regards the availability of the bridging/linking social capital, it has been found that the communities with more connections and collaboration initiatives/projects with various actors (from inside and outside of the communities), were more actively involved in the organization and implementation of civic initiatives, were more involved in the local self-governance and community development projects, and as a result, were better off, as compared to the communities with less cooperation and lower level of civic activism.

Based on the findings of the research, it is suggested that the bridging/linking type of social capital is stronger related to civic participation, and these two mutually reinforce each other, resulting in more of each. The communities which had more stocks of bridging/linking social capital  (connections with other groups, communities, etc.) were found to be more civically active, and had achieved more democratic practices and more effective development strategies/projects in the communities.

### 5.3.2. Civic Education in Armenia

The importance of Civic Education, also referred to as Democratic Citizenship Education or Civics Education, in any democracy, especially a young one, cannot be overstated. Awareness-raising on rights and responsibilities of citizens, as well as those of the state and public institutions, is an essential aspect of the efforts directed to civil society building and democracy promotion. In a post-soviet and currently semi-authoritarian country like Armenia, teaching the population about the workings of the government, civic life and political system, and

disseminating information about democratic principles and values is essential for improving the political culture in the country and equipping the citizens with adequate knowledge to assume their rightful role in creating a more *civil*, *democratic, open* and *inclusive* society.

As it has been already noted, civic education is an important determinant of civic participation, therefore, increasing the level of civic awareness by improving quality of civic education, raising civic awareness (civic knowledge) and capacities (civic skills and dispositions) of the population will inevitably have a positive effect on the level and quality of civic participation in the country.

Since Armenia's declaration of independence in 1991, a number of international organizations have raised and attempted to address the issue of improving civic education in the country, as during the first years of independence, the Republic of Armenia's government took virtually no steps to raise citizen awareness and educate the population about democracy and democratic principles, the newly adopted Constitution, elections and other essential features of a democratic society.

Various international organizations - Junior Achievement of Armenia (JAA), IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), IREX (International Research and Exchanges), Academy for Educational Development, Project Harmony Armenia, Open Society Institute, as well as local NGOs (e.g. Armenian Constitutional Right-Protective Centre), mostly with USAID, the World Bank or other foreign funding, attempted to fill in that gap, and have formulated, designed and implemented interventions aimed at civic education of the adults and youth in Armenia.

One of the major role-players in this respect was Junior Achievement of Armenia (JAA) – an Armenian affiliate of Junior Achievement International non-for profit organization that began introducing Civic Education into public schools throughout Armenia from 1999. By means of a grant received from the World Bank, JAA, in cooperation with the RA Ministry of Education and Science (MES), developed a curriculum for teaching Human Rights in the 8th grade, Basic Civics – in the 9th grade, and Advanced Civics/State's Rights classes in the 10th grade of the Armenian public schools (www.jaarmenia.org). In three years – from 1999 to 2002/2003, JAA reached all the 1400 schools in Armenia, having trained 3200 teachers for instruction of Civics at schools across the country.

In Armenia, general education in schools starts from the age 6 or 7, lasts for 12 years, and according to the National Curriculum, entails the following three levels: (1) Primary or

Elementary school - 4 years (grades 1-4), (2) Middle or Basic school – 5 years (grades 5-9), and (3) High school – 3 years (grades 1-12). After graduating from the high school, young people can choose to continue learning and receive vocational education, typically lasting for 2-4 years, or study towards a degree in higher educational establishments (tertiary education) - Universities or Institutes (4 years –for a Bachelor degree, 5 years- Master's degree, and additional 3-5 years for a doctoral degree).

Due to the joint efforts of the international community and the local non-profits, with the approval of the RA MES, Civic Education is currently taught at all the public schools across Armenia. Curiously enough, though, there is still no effort on the part of the Government to formalize teaching Civic Education and introduce Civics/Democratic citizenship teaching as a formal course at the higher educational establishments in the country, in order to prepare properly educated and methodologically equipped Civic Education teachers for public schools.

At present, 9th grade students at the public schools across the country take the mandatory subject called Social Science (sometimes also translated into English as Social Studies), which consists of two parts: Human Rights and Civic Education. The subject is taught for one hour (a 45- minute lesson is considered as an academic hour in most of the Armenian schools) a week, with no final test or exam. The subject is based on a textbook by Ghazinyan et al (2008)[42] titled *"Social Science: Textbook for the 9th Grade of the Public School"*. No other civic education classes or regularly available trainings/courses for youth or adults are taught in Armenia.

A study of the impact of civic education on students, schools and communities carried out by Tovmasyan and Thoma in 2008, found out that while significant progress has been registered in the country, especially due to the trainings and methodological material developed and provided by JAA, IREX and other international organizations in cooperation with the RA MES and the National Institute for Education (NIE), there are still gaps and pressing issues to be addressed in order to improve the quality of civics instruction throughout the country.

Among the identified issues was use of out-dated teaching methods (mostly lecturing method with little interaction) by the teachers, as most of them had graduated from Pedagogical (Teacher Training) Institutes during soviet times, they used mostly the traditional lecture-based educational

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[42] Ghazinyan, G. (Ed.), Vagahrshyan, A., Hovhannisyan, A., Harutyunyan, N. (2008) *Social Science: (Hasarakagitutyun) Textbook for the 9th grade of the public school*, Tigran Mets Publishing House

methods which did not particularly encourage critical thinking, creativity, independent work, and were mainly based on repetition of the textbook material and question – answer (from the textbook) approach. Other related issues were lack of pedagogical expertise and formal preparation of Civics teachers, lack of teaching materials, including audio- and video-material and other visual aids in the classrooms, lack of motivation on the part of the students to learn, limited or no cooperation with local self-administrative bodies, limited teaching time, emphasis on knowledge part of the subject and inadequate attention to teaching skills required for living in a democratic society, etc. (Tovmasyan and Thoma 2008).

To add to the existing research findings, a small-scale primary research has been carried out within the framework of this study to assess the current level and quality of civic education in terms of its adequacy for preparing knowledgeable and responsible citizens committed to democratic principles and values in Armenia.

2 rural schools (selected randomly from case study communities) and 2 urban schools (selected form Vanadzor school database, out of 36 schools in total) (www.edu.am) have been selected for the research.

The primary research has included:

- Textbook review;
- Class observation in 4 schools (2 rural, 2 urban);
- Semi-structured interviews with Civics teachers at the schools;
- Informal semi-structured interviews with the 9th grade students at the selected schools.

The main points of the class observation and the questions of the semi-structured interviews with teachers and students are presented in Annex 3.

Research Results:

*Textbook Review*

"Social Science for the 9th Grade" (by Ghazinyan et al 2008) textbook has been approved by the RA Ministry of Education and is currently used as the main teaching material for the mandatory Human Rights and Civic Education classes at public schools throughout the country.

The Human Rights section of the textbook provides an overview of Human Rights generations, and specifies the personal, socio-economic, political, cultural and civic rights. Some tasks under

sections include conducting small scale sociological surveys – for instance, asking people in students' surrounding what they know about Human Rights, and explaining them to those who do not know much about the subject, etc. The part on Human Rights also covers the Constitution, Rights and Responsibilities of a Citizen, the Relationship between the State and the Citizen, Responsibilities of the State, Child's Rights, Women's Rights, Rights of People with Disabilities, Rights and Freedoms, Right to Free Speech, Religion, etc. Sections also provide information on International documents - Guarantees of Human Rights, on the United Nations, various Committees and their functions, etc.

The chapters on Civic Education cover the concept of Democracy, its roots and history, as well as problems connected with ensuring Democracy in practice. It is peculiar that the textbook presents Democracy as an ideal, and the main problem is presented as that of 'turning democracy into reality'.

The Civic Education chapters also present in detail the topic of Elections – the process, phases, etc., and discuss in detail the topic of Division of Power into legislative, judicial, and executive branches and their functions.

The section also contains a chapter on Civil Society, where it is stressed that civic society has a potential to self-govern and the structure of civil society is presented as a combination of social, political, economic, cultural and informational systems. Importance of non-governmental organizations is highlighted, as well as political ones, and that of an availability of a competitive political system where different political parties function.

The textbook defines civic participation as *"a type of democracy"* and states, that *"Participatory democracy means that besides the elections, citizens should have the right and opportunity to actively take part in decision-making, political processes, and have a control over the execution of the adopted decisions"* (pg. 175). As a task, the students are asked to teach somebody from their environment the behavioural features of a *real citizen*.

The section also covers topics about leadership, corruption and its consequences. The chapter on Power explains the need for separation of power and details the role of the President of the Republic, presents the legislative body - the National Assembly (Armenian Parliament), its functions, operations, the executive body – the Government, Prime-Minister and the Ministries, and their functions, as well as the Judicial system with its hierarchy of Common Jurisdiction

Courts of 1<sup>st</sup> instance, Court of Appeal and Court of Cassation. As a task under this section, the students are asked to hold elections and elect the president of their class.

Another chapter in the textbook covers the main principles of the RA Law on Territorial Self-Government and presents details about Local Self-Governance in Armenia, specifies that the Regional Governors (Marzpets) are appointed by the Prime-Minister, while the Community Leaders - Mayors, as well as the Community Council members, who are the Elders of the Community and are being consulted about the Community budget, expenses and development plans, are elected by the local population. The chapter also mentions that the land belongs to the community and that the community budget is 'self-forming', which means its main source is the land and property taxes paid by the local population, as well as fees for any provided services. A task at the end of this chapter suggests inviting a community leader or a representative of the local government and asking them to present the development plan of the community. The students are then asked to make a development plan for their own community.

The textbook appears to cover most of the important subjects related to civic or democratic citizenship education, albeit, in my view, in a little more theoretical, rather than interactive manner. Many tasks at the end of the chapters or sections appear to be formulated based on "learning by teaching" principle, implying that if you can teach something, then you know it. However, the nature of the tasks – for example, teaching somebody from the students' neighbourhood or surrounding, does not allow for an objective assessment of the quality of the performed tasks. It would indeed be impossible to check if the student had actually taught somebody or no, or what exactly s/he had taught about the subject. The tasks also do not seem to connect very well the included material with the everyday life of the students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. For instance, it would be quite difficult, if not impossible, for a student in an urban community to approach a community leader and invite him/her to the school. As the existing research indicates, homework tasks could have been more useful if they could connect the topics with everyday life or current news and events, for instance, discussing actual elections – reading newspaper articles on recent elections (or any other subject at hand, e.g. community development plan, UN resolutions, various rights and related topics, etc.) and discussing the theory and practice in the class or writing an essay as homework. This would help the students to connect the theoretical material with the practice – read newspapers or online articles on the given subject, analyse them and present their own critical assessment, views, etc.

I met and talked to the administration and Social Science teachers at the 4 selected schools about this research and its goals, and asked for their cooperation. All 4 schools expressed their support and agreed to let me observe one lesson, interview the Social Science teacher and 9th grade students. However, it is worth noting that the principals and the staff at the rural schools were more open and supportive, being flattered that I was interested in their school and views, while the principals and teachers of urban schools were more suspicious and it took a lot more explaining and reassuring them that I did not represent the Ministry of Education or any other public institution checking on them, in order to convince them to allow me to observe a lesson and interview the 9th grade students.

*Lesson Observation*

The format of all the 4 lessons observed was traditional - teacher led, only in one school the teacher used also group discussion method during the class: she gave an assignment for discussion and invited the students to make short presentations on behalf of their group afterwards. Generally, the lessons were heavily based on the textbook and the answers were expected to be from it, with little or no encouragement for opinions or critical analysis or comments on the topics at hand. In 2 of the schools students also had RA Constitution booklets together with their textbooks at the desks. Only in 1 school the teacher also used a newspaper, reading a case from it and quizzing students on their knowledge of the subject. Except for the RA Constitution, which was referred to in a few instances, and a newspaper in the afore-mentioned classroom, no other visual or audio- and video-materials were used during the observed lessons.

The lessons could hardly be characterized as interactive or engaging, they mostly resembled the 'old school' traditional soviet time lessons with expressed leading role of the teacher, who questions students on the previously learnt material and delivers a lecture-like presentation of the new topic, afterwards giving the homework assignment.

While there were many students actively participating in the class and aiming to impress with their knowledge of the subject and preparedness, the majority of the students in all the 4 classes did not appear very interested or motivated to learn. The teachers appeared to be eager to answer any questions the students might have, however, the latter did not seem to have many questions; there were only a few cases when students asked questions, which were subsequently answered by the teachers.

During the observed lessons, there were no guests/visitors from the community or other institutions.

*Interviews with Teachers:*

The semi-structured interviews with Civic Education teachers were organized after the lesson observation, and lasted for around 20-30 minutes each. Three of the teachers were female, one - male. They were all specialists of History and had a Diploma from a Teacher Training (Pedagogical) University. All of the 4 teachers reported to have received training in Civics within the framework of JAA projects, as well as other trainings organized by NIE and other international organizations (IREX, AED and Project Harmony were mentioned). Each teacher reported taking part in at least 4 trainings over the course of the previous 5-7 years, however, they all expressed a wish to be involved in more training opportunities and exchange programs in order to further improve their knowledge of the subject and teaching methods.

All the 4 interviewed teachers expressed their general approval of the he textbook content and the organization of the topics, and considered it to be adequate for equipping the students with the knowledge and skills necessary for life in a democratic society. However, 2 of the interviewees noted that the textbook was full of new concepts and terms, and expressed a view that it was somewhat complicated for the students of the middle school. Their suggestion was introducing basic concepts at an earlier stage to the students, so that by the 9th grade they would be ready to fully comprehend those concepts and the importance and aim of learning them. The teachers also suggested introducing Civic Education classes at college level, during the 1st or 2nd years of the vocational or higher education, so that the students can refresh and deepen their knowledge and actually apply their skills, for instance, by voting (age requirement for voting in Armenia is 18 and older) or attending a Community Council meeting.

All of the teachers thought that one lesson once a week was not sufficient for learning the subject well. The teachers of the urban schools complained that the students pay more attention to other subjects, such as mathematics or foreign languages, considering them more important, and their parents hire tutors for them to prep for exams and University admission, while Social Science is considered as additional subject the students 'have to take' once a week in order to qualify for the middle school certificate.

Regarding the question about the use of interactive teaching methods, the teachers all reported using some, such as group discussions, role-plays, discussion of case studies in the classroom, etc.

The teachers also noted that the students were not quite prepared for use of such methods, as '*they made a lot of noise*' and '*did not take the lessons seriously*' if they used role-plays and group discussions, and the teachers were getting complaints and school administration warnings regarding the noise during their lessons. '*Excessive noise during the lesson*' was cited as one of the main reasons they did not used interactive teaching methods on regular basis. They all indicated using mock elections and some other simulation methods where the subjects they taught required, as well as using newspaper articles and other material, where relevant. Lack of use of audio- and video-materials and online resources during the lessons was ascribed to the general scarcity of school's funds and lack of technical means/technology. The urban schools had a classroom with computers and Internet connection provided within the framework of Project Harmony 'School Connectivity Program', however, it was reported that those classrooms were mainly used for teaching 'Informatics' (Computer Science) classes. The teachers indicated that, where possible, they tried to use additional teaching resources and material, as well as invite representatives from the Municipality or other institutions that they were studying about, to deliver a presentation and answer the students' questions related to the topic at hand.

The teachers estimated the involvement of the school, community and students' parents in the teaching process as '*minimal*' and admitted that increasing their involvement would be beneficial for the students and make them more motivated to learn.

To my query regarding the tangibility and success of the homework tasks, when, for instance, the students were asked to invite a Community leader to the class, the teachers confessed trying to invite a community leader by themselves, and some of them reported being successful in persuading a community leader to be a guest at a lesson, or being lucky if there was a community leader among the parents of the students and the latter agreed to be a guest and tell the students about his/her job, and answer their questions.

While the teachers generally expressing a positive opinion about the textbook and the assignments, they also noted that some tasks could be more practical or more useful and motivating if they would be presented not as a game, but a real-life experience. For instance, it was suggested that the community plan that the students were asked to write as a part of their homework for the Chapter on Local Self-Governance, could be organized as a content: the plans could be discussed among a special Committee created at the school, and the winners would be selected to present their Development Plans in front of the Community Council. This way, the

students would feel they were not simply playing a game, but their work was serious and could have a real impact on their community. An urban school- teacher reported using the subject of elections to organize and hold actual elections of the class leader and the student council, which gave the students a chance to apply their knowledge in practice.

A suggestion made by teachers for increasing the efficiency of Civic Education lessons at schools was incorporating study visits and educational tours to at least some of the institutions/structures the students were learning about. Teachers mentioned that study tours to, for instance, the United Nations Office in Yerevan, the National Assembly, a Court, a Ministry or the local Municipality could significantly increase the interest of the students and give them first-hand experience and a chance to inquire and learn more about the given structure, its role and functions, as well as help comprehend better the textbook material about it. The teachers noted that study visits could dramatically improve the attendance of the students at Social Science classes and motivate them to learn better.

(Table 7 includes some of the comments made by Civics teachers during the interviews.)

*Table 7: Comments of Respondents, Received During Civic Education Teacher Interviews*

> ➢ *"The textbook is not bad, it includes all the relevant material and topics. It could perhaps provide more background on the concepts explained and include more examples of their application… but this is something that teachers can do too… a lot depends on the teacher and how the material is presented and explained… you cannot rely on the textbook alone".*
> ➢ *"The textbook material is good, but there could be more practical tasks included as homework, for instance, preparing a letter to the President, or a suggestion for the Municipality, etc."*
> ➢ *"More could be done to motivate the students to learn better, like involving the school and the community in the process of teaching, for example, by organizing a contest for a good community development plan, which can be later presented in front of the Community Council, and the student - recognized for his/her input in the community…"*
> ➢ *"Teachers could use some trainings or seminars to improve their knowledge, skills and teaching methods, exchange experience and learn from each other. We would also love to go on a study tour and see how Civics is taught in long established democratic countries..."*
> ➢ *"Teachers could use some trainings or seminars to improve their knowledge, skills and teaching methods, exchange experience and learn from each other. We would also love to go on a study tour and see how Civics is taught in long established*

*democratic countries..."*

> *"Students would definitely benefit from educational visits and study tours and seeing with their own eyes how the structures like the RA National Assembly, Courts or Ministries work… this would be very motivating for them and would make the material in the textbook to appear less abstract or theoretical'.*

*Interviews with Students*

Interviews with 9th grade students were semi-structured and informal; they were held in the classroom or school hallway, resembling a friendly chat. Teachers were not present at the interviews, and the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed to encourage them to express their honest opinions and views.

Interviews with the students reveal that some of them consider the subject to be *'very interesting'*, and some consider it to be *'a little boring'*. Many of the students noted that the subject was *'somewhat difficult'* as it included many new terms and concepts that were not easy to grasp and remember. The majority of the students thought that the textbook was adequate and covered important topics and information they needed to be knowledgeable about democratic processes and able to protect their rights, while, some found it to be *'too theoretical'* and *'complicated'*.

It is also curious that some of the interviewed students did not have a clear understanding of the aim of studying Civics. Some of them thought they needed to study the subject well in order to be able to protect their rights, to avoid being cheated or fooled by some state institution, or to become a Judge, a Minister or a President in the future. Nonetheless, some students were clear about the primary goal of learning Civics and mentioned becoming a responsible, engaged and committed to democratic principles citizen.

During the interviews, many of the students expressed frustration with the fact that they learn something that seemed to be somewhat difficult to relate with their everyday life. For instance, they pointed out that while they studied the subject of elections, they did not have the right to vote yet (9th graders are 15 years old, while the minimum age for voting is 18 in Armenia), nor can they get involved in any of the institutions they learn about, and some material was considered as *'distant'* and *'having little connection to their life'*.

To my question regarding the efforts to connect the taught material with everyday life in their community, the majority's view was that they did their best to do so where possible, but most of the topics were not easily relatable to their everyday life. Some students indicated that they participated in the community and volunteered in the events like neighbourhood clean-ups, tree planting and organization of some cultural events, such as holiday celebrations, puppet shows for children, etc. Only a few reported having participated in a community meeting or making a proposal regarding a community issue or solving a community problem. The students of the rural schools, who due to the small size of the community and informal relationship among the members of their small neighbourhood, could meet and talk to their community leaders on daily basis, mentioned that when they approached their community leaders and made some community development related proposal, they were rarely taken seriously, and were most often asked to perform some routine physical or manual work, such as clean–up of the neighbourhood or school or help with some construction or installation work.

To the question about the use of interactive methods and other teaching material in addition to the textbook during the class, most of the students mentioned question-answer sessions, group discussions and mock elections, as well as reported use of the RA Constitution, newspapers and occasionally – other relevant books and brochures during the lessons. There was no mention of use of audio-or video-material or computers/Internet during the classes.

Most of the students indicated that their teacher was answering all their questions and trying to motivate them to learn the subject, however, they confessed that sometimes they felt there was too much information to digest during one lesson. Some students suggested that having 2 hours every week instead of one could improve the situation and help them better understand all the new concepts and their application. Another related suggestion was having one theoretical lesson followed by a 'practical' one, where they would discuss or apply the learnt material on a real-life or simulated situation to understand it better.

(Some of the quotes of the interviewed students are presented in the Table 8.)

*Table 8: Comments of Respondents During Interviews with the 9th Grade Students, Taking Civic Education at Public Schools in Armenia*

| |
|---|
| ➢ *"I like the subject very much, we learn about important things, important institutions, positions, functions, elections… My dream is to become a Minister one day, that is why I* |

> *want to learn this subject well".*
>
> ➢ *"The subject is very interesting, I like learning about elections, the President and his role… some terms and concepts are a little difficult to understand, but our teacher tries to explain them in a simpler language …".*
>
> ➢ *"The subject is a little boring for me, it is too theoretical, doesn't seem to be applicable in our life… in real life everything is different, you need to know the right people and have lots of money to become a Minister or be elected as a Deputy in the National Assembly… it is not for regular people".*
>
> ➢ *"I would like the lessons to be more interesting - with more students actively participating, discussing, doing role-plays, rather than mostly required to keep silent and listen to the lectures or retell the textbook material in front of the class…".*
>
> ➢ *"It's a pity that we cannot vote now, or at least be an observer at elections… I would love to be an observer during elections and make sure everything is fair, and nobody makes people vote for their candidate, stuffs the ballots or falsifies the results…"*

The research on Civic Education in Armenia shed light at the present situation and the adequacy of the classes for the purposes of educating the youth to become knowledgeable and responsible citizens who live by and further spread democratic principles and values in a young democratic country.

While, obviously, there have been certain advancements in this regard over the recent decade, such as recognizing the need for Civic Education at schools, preparing Civic Education teachers by organizing a series of trainings on Civic Education and Human Rights for them, introducing Civic Education in the middle school curriculum, publishing textbooks, etc., there are still serious gaps to be filled in and areas to be improved, in order to ensure an adequate level of Civic Education in the young democratic country.

The research has revealed that there is still a need to solve the issue of training Civic Education or 'Social Studies' specialists by introducing adequate university level courses at Teacher training (Pedagogical) Institutes across the country. Among other areas requiring redress are organization of regular trainings for Civic Education teachers, with the view of improving their teaching skills and methods, introducing Civic Education basics at an elementary or early middle school level,

improving the textbook for the 9th grade and including more practical and real-life related tasks, developing critical thinking skills, involving the parents and community in the teaching process and incorporating more study tours and educational visits to various establishments for the students to help them better relate the learnt material with practice. Other areas for improvement could be introducing a more advanced course at higher educational establishments, creating a structure/establishment that would be responsible for teacher trainings, on-going work and improvement of the teaching material and, most importantly, organizing regular Civic Education seminars and/or courses for the general population.

While the younger generation actually receives some basic level of knowledge of democratic citizenship (9th grade classes), no matter how imperfect or lacking it is, it is important to stress that the older generation - those who graduated from high school before 2000, have not had any training in Civics or Democratic Education, even though they are currently the ones that occupy most of the high level positions in government and other public institutions.

Therefore, it is suggested that alongside other measures directed to improving civic education in the country (such as introducing basic classes in Civic at the elementary school level and improving the curriculum for the middle school), training courses in Civics are organized and made mandatory for the high level officials, as this specific measure can be critical for improving, strengthening and democratizing public institutions.

## 5.3.3. ICT and Civic Participation in Armenia

As it has been previously mentioned, during the recent years, Internet has become more and more accessible in Armenia. Removing the monopoly in the sphere of telecommunications from 2006 has greatly contributed to the growth of ICT sector in the country – the mobile phone market and Internet penetration grew rapidly from 2007 onwards. Mobile phones and Internet are now increasingly available to larger layers of the population. Currently, there are four major mobile operators in the country – Viva Cell MTS, ArmenTel (Beeline), Orange Armenia and UCOM, which provide broadband Internet connection to their subscribers at competitive prices. Mobile coverage in Armenia is around 116%, and there are around 1.500.000 Internet subscriber (fixed subscribers– 270.000), and Internet penetration is now estimated to be at around 55% (Freedom House 2015).

Freedom House report "Freedom on the Net 2015" describes Internet in Armenia as quite liberal, with no incidents of blocking political and/or social sites (a few cases of blocking political content were registered only in 2008, in the aftermath of the Presidential Elections and the followed unrest and demonstrations in Yerevan), or arresting blogger/ICT users.

With the aim for collecting detailed information on the use of ICT for civic participation purposes in Armenia, a Questionnaire form has been developed and administered among the graduate students in the capital Yerevan and the 2 other larger cities of Armenia – Gyumri and Vanadzor. Higher educational establishments have been randomly selected for the survey. Master level students (5th year of studies) in two Universities in Yerevan and one in each smaller city have been surveyed in 2013. The total number of respondents was 180. It is suggested that the sample is representative for the whole country, as these 3 cities represent the main satellite cities for education (as well as employment) for the youth across the whole country.

The Survey on ICT use in Armenia covers a variety of details pertaining to Internet use for civic participation. (The Questionnaire form is translated into English and presented in Annex 3).

The main blocks of questions are the following:

1) Patterns and preferences in internet use – frequency, purpose, most regularly visited sites;
2) Access to online media – preferences regarding the newspapers, news agencies, radio and TV stations, access to alternative media, writing to newspapers, writing in forums, writing in blogs, comments, etc.
3) Online communication with public institutions – writing messages, requests for information, complaints and appeals to state agencies
4) Online communication with non-state actors, other CSOs (local, regional, national, international)
5) Civic participation via internet – joining causes, campaigns, protests, participation in various civic initiatives, participation in demonstrations, donating money for causes, organizing and initiating campaigns, protests and other initiatives via internet, starting causes, petitions, etc.

The following section presents the discussion and analysis of the Survey results.

***ICT use For Civic Participation Survey Results***
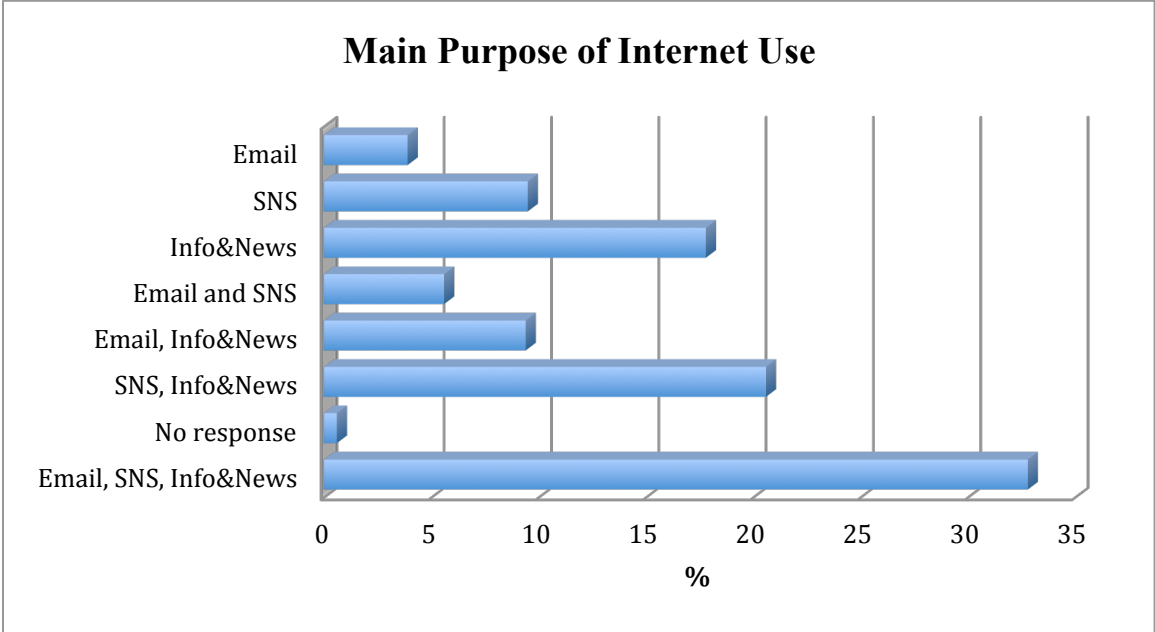
Frequency of Internet Use and the Main Purpose of Use

The survey results indicate, that 73.9% of the respondents use Internet 'Every day', and 19% - use Internet a few times a week. These results are quite impressive and indicate that Internet use has rapidly spread among the youth in Armenia. (See Figure 4.)

*Figure 4: Frequency of Internet Use in Armenia*
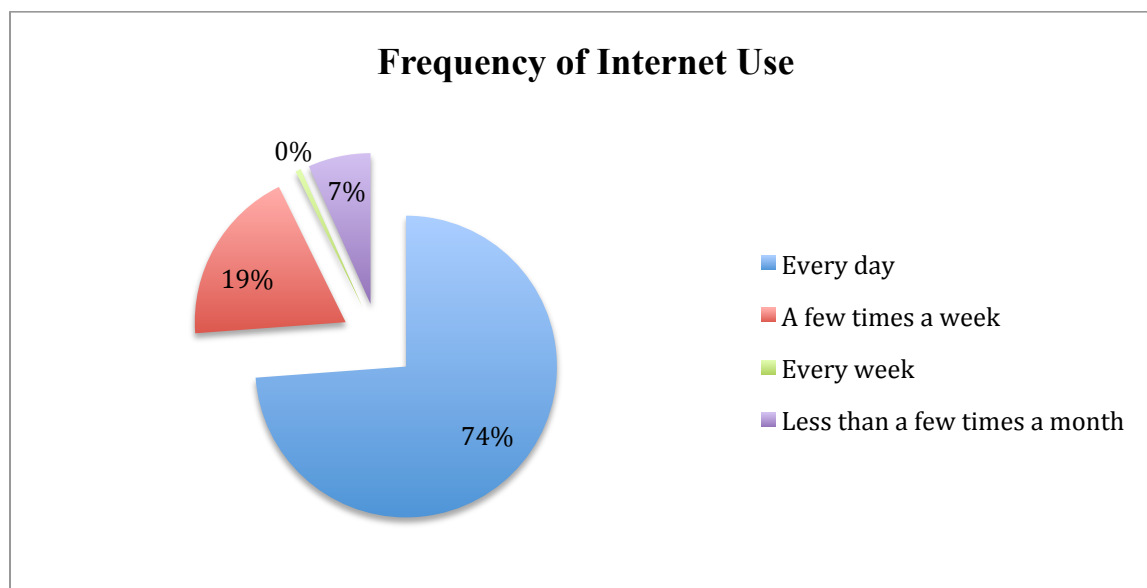


As to the question regarding the main purpose of Internet use, the respondents had a multiple choice and were asked to mark relevant options. The largest share of the respondents – almost 33% - indicated using Internet for the combination of E-mail (personal and/or work), social networking, and access to information and news. Next largest share of respondents indicated use of Internet mainly for social networking and accessing information and news. (See Figure 5.)

*Figure 5: Main Purpose of Internet Use in Armenia*

**Main Purpose of Internet Use**

A horizontal bar chart showing percentages (%) for each category:
- Email: ~4
- SNS: ~10
- Info&News: ~18
- Email and SNS: ~6
- Email, Info&News: ~10
- SNS, Info&News: ~21
- No response: ~1
- Email, SNS, Info&News: ~33

As the most frequently visited websites, the largest share of respondents - 33.8% indicated *Facebook,* and another 19.4% - '*Odnoklassniki*' (Classmates) – a Russian social networking website. Other frequented websites included Google and/or Gmail, Local News websites and other, mostly Russian email and search engines (Rambler, etc.). (See Figure 6 for more detailed breakdown.)

*Figure 6: Most Frequently Used Websites in Armenia*

**Most Frequently Used Websites**

A horizontal bar chart showing percentages (%) for each website:
- Facebook: ~34
- Odnoklassniki: ~19
- Google/Gmail: ~17
- Yahoo: ~1
- Youtube: ~4
- Twitter: ~1
- Local News: ~5
- Other/Email: ~8

214
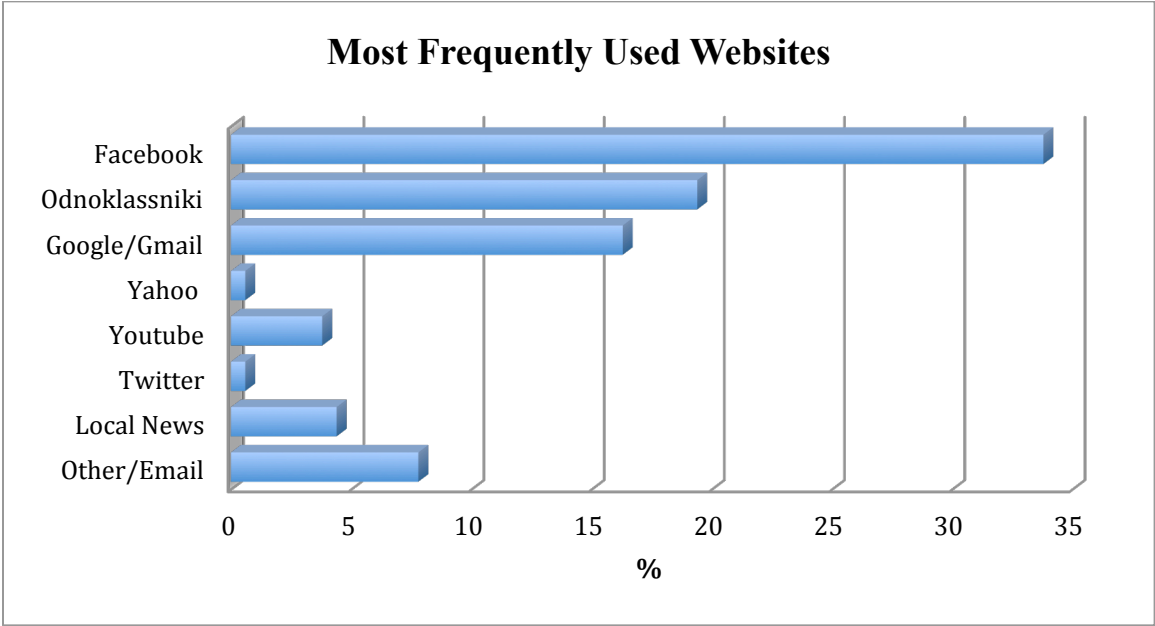
Given the fact that most TV and radio stations are directly or indirectly controlled by the state, or rather - the ruling party, having access to alternative channels of information and news in this climate is very important for the Armenians who want to access less biased and more balanced views on the current news and events. In this light, it is remarkable, that 72.2% of the respondents indicated using Internet for accessing online media. However, almost 50% of the respondents noted local newspaper and TV/Radio websites as their most frequented source of information, and only 1.1% - indicated use of International news and TV/Radio stations. (Figure 7 presents a more detailed breakdown of the most frequented media websites.)

*Figure 7: Use of Online Media: Most Frequented Websites*
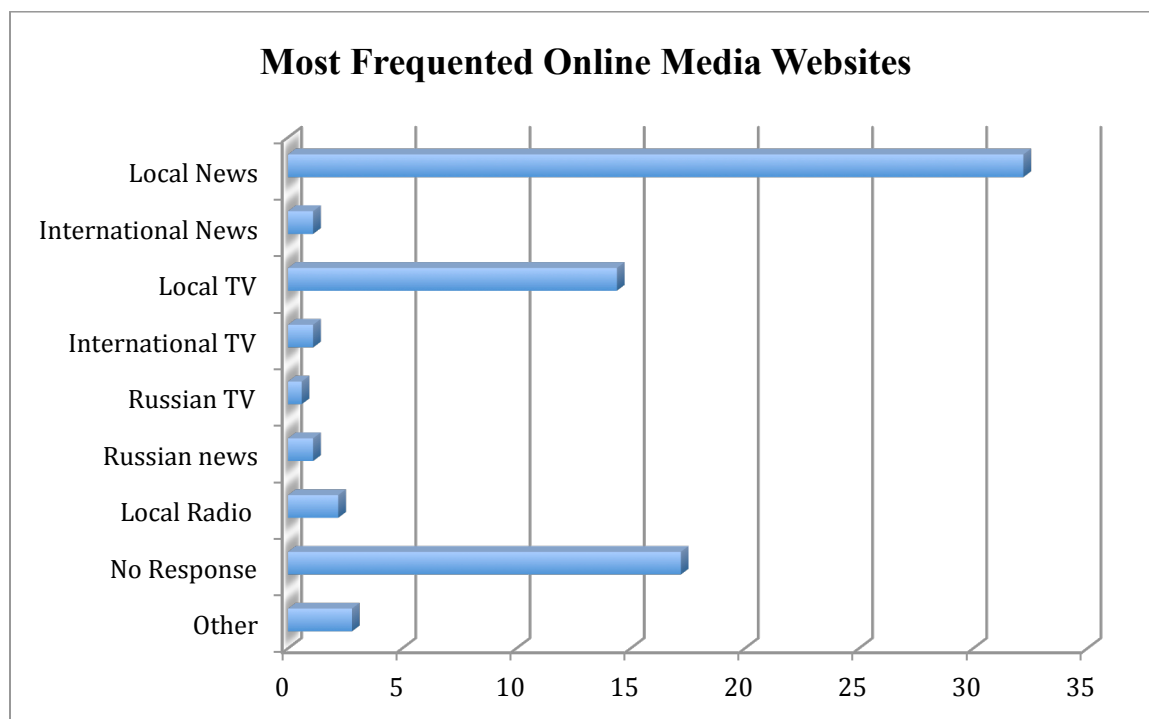


As mentioned earlier, Internet in Armenia has so far been relatively free from the state control, and alongside with the pro-government news agencies and TV stations that have an online presentation, there is also a number of oppositional, Armenian Diaspora and/or internationally funded media and news agencies that publish and transmit online and have quite a large audience. Among those are www.zhamanak.com, www.azatutyun.am (RFE/RL webpage, TV and radio), etc. Thus, the people interested in learning viewpoints, opinions and takes on the current news and events other than those of the pro-state media can search and find them online. The only

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barrier here is the lack of knowledge of the English language, which is needed for searching and watching international media online. Younger generation is somewhat better off in this respect, as their 1st foreign language is English, instead of Russian, which has been the case with older generations.

Writing comments in news, blogs and/or forums or otherwise engaging in communication and information exchange with any online media or their readership/audience

The survey results reveal that around 30% of the respondents wrote comments in news, blogs or forums and engaged in communication and information exchange with online media. (See Figure 8.)

*Figure 8: Writing in Comments, Blogs, Forums, and Communicating with Online Media and their Readership/Audience*
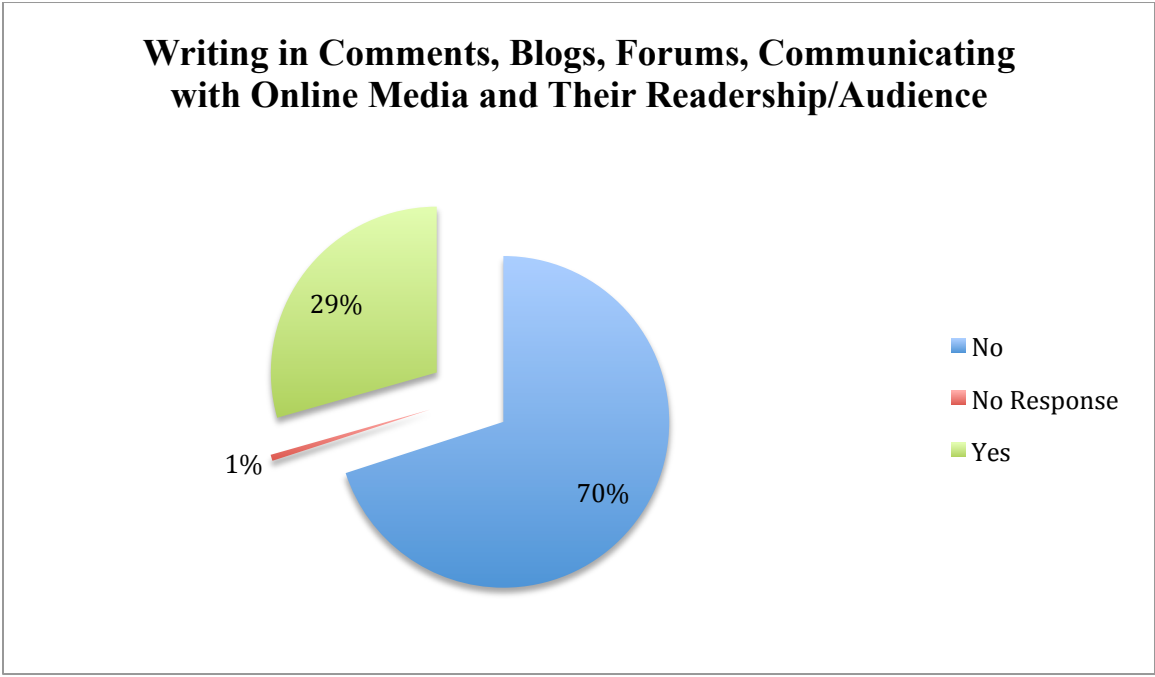


As to the specific media where they engaged in communication, the largest percentage of the respondents indicated writing comments on local news websites (12.8%), followed by writing in forums (3.3%). (See Figure 9.)

*Figure 9: Media, Where Respondents Engaged in Communication*



**Media Where Respondents Engaged in Communication (%)**
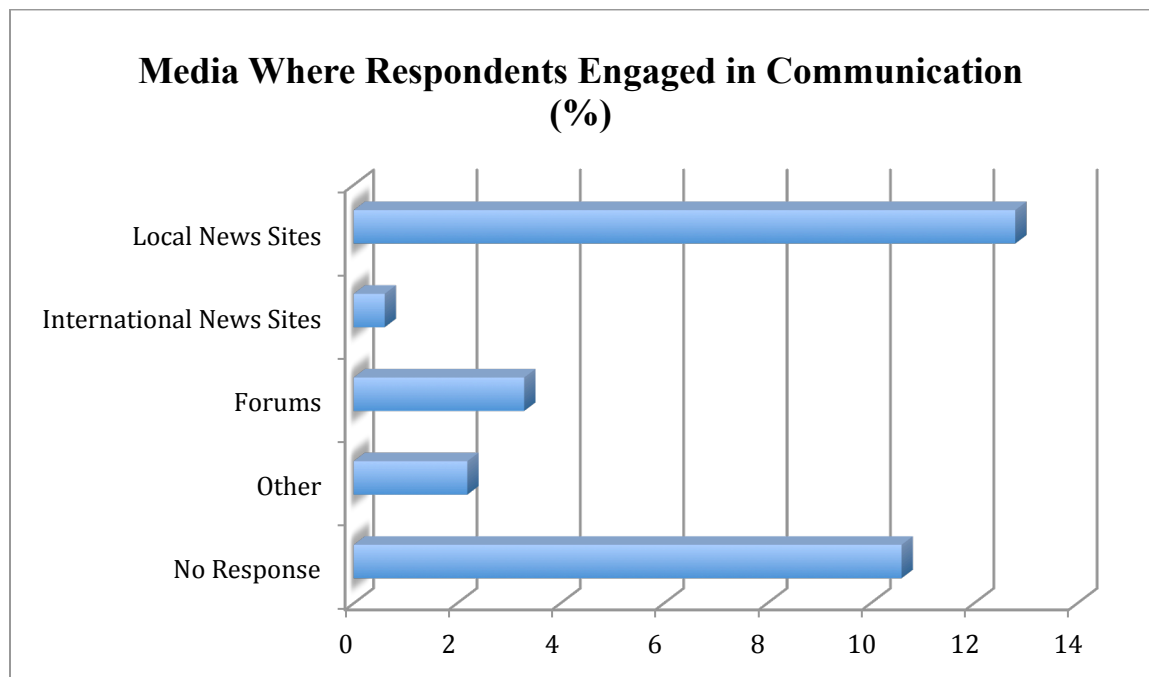
Consulting/Accessing Information on Public Agency Website

28.9% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question whether they consulted/accessed information on a public agency (Government, National Assembly, Ministries, Municipalities, Employment agencies, State Insurance service, etc.) website.

Online Communication with any Public Agency

According to the survey results, only 10.6% of the respondents answered positively to the question about engaging in online communication with a public agency. As to the purpose of the communication, 6.1% mentioned requesting information, and 3.3 % mentioned filing a complaint.

Consulting/Accessing Information on any Non-governmental Organization Website

The survey revealed that 36.1% of the respondents consulted/accessed information on a non-governmental organization (including charities, benevolent organizations, unions, etc.) website. It is interesting to note this it is almost by 10% more than the share of the respondents consulting public agency websites. (See Figure 10.)

Engaging in Online Communication with a Non-Governmental Organization

14.4% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question about engaging in online communication with non-governmental organizations. As to the purpose of the communication, 7.8% of the respondents noted requesting information, 3.3% - requesting support, and 3.3% - offering collaboration.

The data reveal that the respondents contacted NGOs online more frequently than they contacted government offices, as well as they sought assistance from NGOs more often than from public agencies. Similarly, they offered to collaborate with NGOs more, than they did with public agencies. (See Figure 11.)

*Figure 10: Consulting/Accessing Information Online: Public Agency Website vs. NGO*
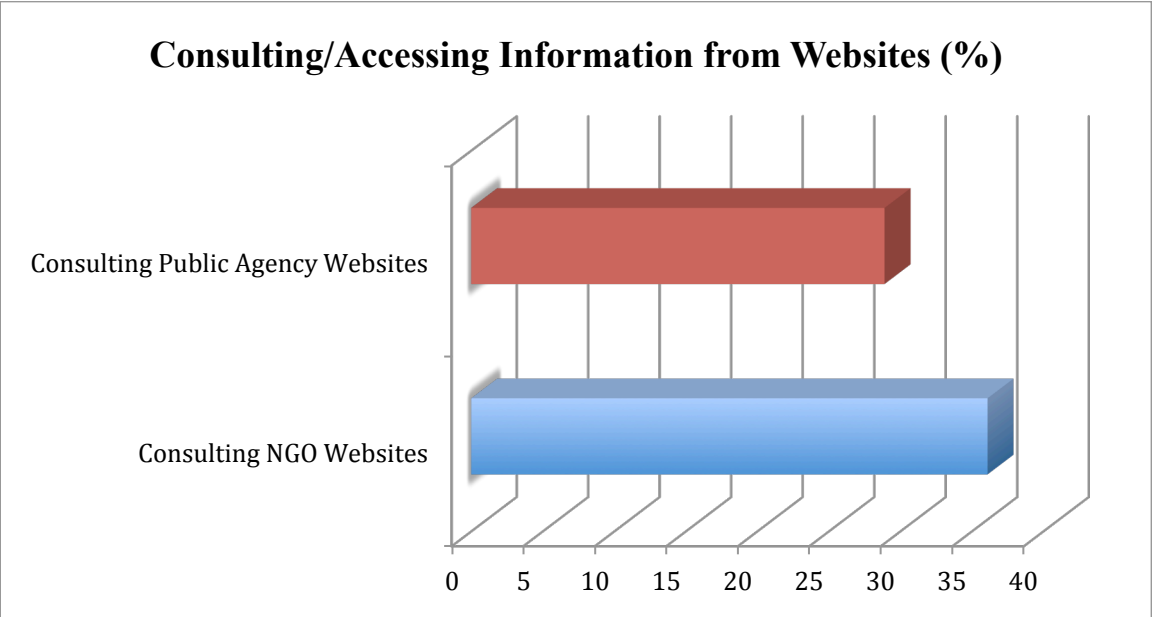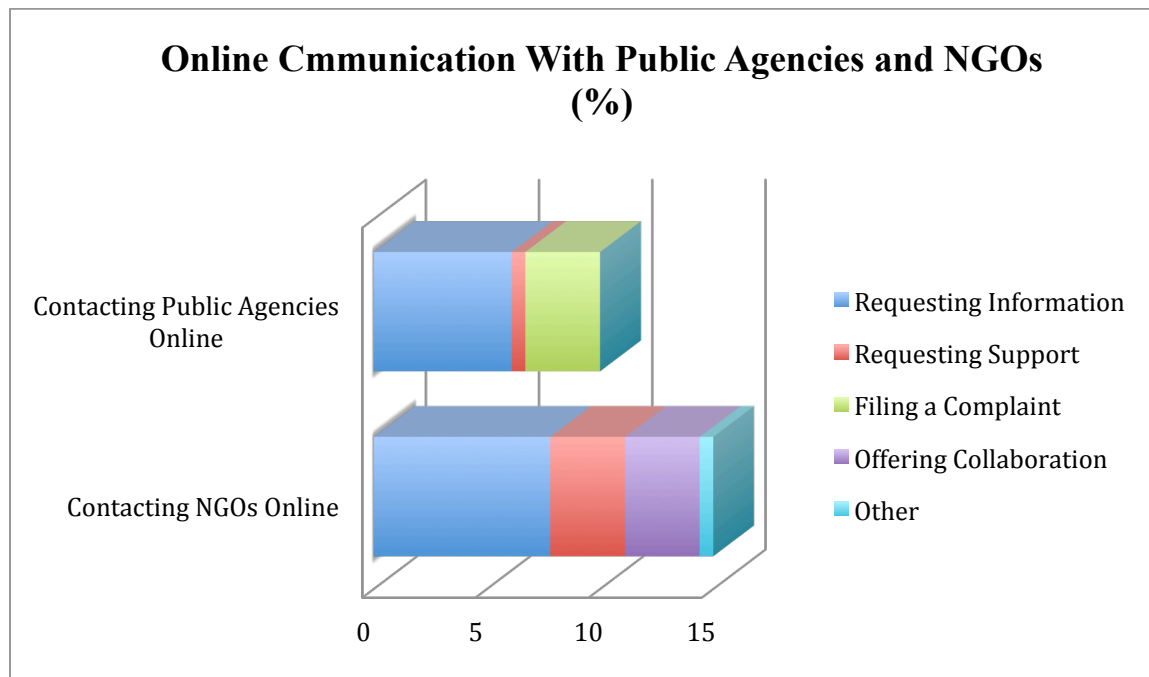
**Online Cmmunication With Public Agencies and NGOs (%)**

Participating in Online Causes, Petitions, Campaigns and/or Other Civic Initiatives

Around 32% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question on participation in online causes, campaigns, petitions and/or other civic initiatives.

(These results are compatible with those received from the 'Civic Health' Survey, presented in Chapter 6). The respondents were also asked to specify the type of civic initiative they participated in: 11.1% of the respondents indicated taking part in a civic campaign or a cause organized online, 10.0% - in signing and sharing petitions online, and 6.1% - in donating money for online causes.

Initiating/Starting an Online Civic Campaign or Cause and the Outcome of the Latter

11.1% of the respondents indicated initiating/starting an online campaign or cause. The respondents were also asked to specify the outcome of the civic campaign or cause. 3.9% of the respondents indicated that the campaign/cause achieved its aim. 4.4% of the respondents noted that the campaign/cause made some impact, and 2.2% - indicated that the campaign did not achieve its aim. 1.1% of the respondents did not specify (missing response) the outcome.

Overall, the results of the Survey on ICT use for civic participation in Armenia can be considered positive, especially the outcomes related to the use of ICT use in general (74% of respondents

used Internet 'Every day') and use of ICT as a source of obtaining and sharing news and information (72% of respondents used online media, 34% - used Facebook, and about 20% - its Russian language alternative 'Odnoklassniki').

Although these results can only be representative of the situation with the youth in the country, they still point to the gaps and obstacles and outline opportunities for further improvement. Judging from the results, it is obvious that the use of ICT for consulting public agency websites and communicating with those structures – requesting information, appealing, filing a complaint, or making proposals/suggestions are still in embryonic state – only about 19% of the respondents consulted websites of public agencies, and only about 10.5% actually contacted them to solve a certain problem. These figures prompt the need to strengthen the efforts aimed at the development and improvement of e-governance in Armenia, increasing transparency of the public agencies and their workings, improving their online representation and ability to establish and maintains an effective two-way communication and a feedback mechanism with citizens. The same is true also in regards with NGOs - an open and transparent presentation of objectives, budgets, funding sources, current projects, information on eligibility and opportunities for involvement in them, as well as an effective dialogue between the NGOs and public are important factors for increasing trust, recognition and effectiveness of NGOs in the society.

## 5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analyzed the determinants of civic participation in Armenia. The factors affecting the level and magnitude of civic participation have been conditionally divided into two groups, around which the discussion evolved. Additionally, as major determinants of civic participation – social capital, civic education and use of ICT for civic activism in Armenia have been separately studied and described in more detail. The findings of the research have provided a comprehensive picture of the key determinants of civic participation, as well as identified the related obstacles, challenges, as well as opportunities for improving/increasing civic participation in the country.

It has been found out that an array of individual level factors, such as resources – time, money, education, individual level social capital (i.e. connections, networks, trust, etc.), access to ICT and ICT use skills; age, gender, personal traits, as well as agency and personal characteristic of the

community leaders, have been significantly affecting the level of civic participation in the communities cross the country.

The research has revealed that younger people (students and young professionals) were more actively involved in the community affairs, compared to people belonging to the older generation, who more often complained of lack of time and financial resources, which otherwise could have allowed them to be more civically active. While some middle aged men – who had jobs in private or public sectors, appeared to be also actively involved in civic activities in their communities, the situation was different for middle-aged or married women, who were mostly excluded from participating in community activities because of the burden of household duties. Younger women, however (mostly school or university students) have been quite actively involved in the civic initiatives, especially in awareness-raising campaigns, seminars, organization of community cleanups and cultural events.

It has been also found that the agency (personal traits, educational level, connections, etc.) of the Mayor played a decisive role in the level and magnitude of civic participation in communities. Educated, younger and more open to cooperation Mayors have crated a more favorable for civic engagement environment which allowed a more meaningful civic participation of the community, including participation in decision-making regarding the issues affecting the community's life. In these communities the development plan and community budget were accessible to all the interested citizens and the leaders have typically been meeting and discussing community priorities and issues with the residents on regular basis. In contrast, communities with Mayors who did not have adequate level of education or were distrustful, suspicions and uncooperative, the citizens appeared to be blocked from any meaningful civic participation or having input in the decision-making on issues of importance to the community. Communities where Mayors lacked high education, computer and other skills (e.g. ability to draw up an adequate community's development plan, etc.) appeared to be especially vulnerable in this respect. As a solution to this issue, it is suggested that the requirements presented to community leader candidates could be modified to allow election of more educated and capable citizens, with less consideration for their experience in public service.

As regards the contextual level determinants, institutions, socio-economic conditions, infrastructure and economic outlook, capacity of the civil society organizations, accessibility of ICT in the given locality, availability of international assistance, and a number of other factors

have been found to be influencing the level and forms of civic participation across the Armenian communities.

It has been argued that quality and capacity of institutions – local self-governance bodies in case of communities, and that of the civil society actors (NGOs, CBOs, etc.) play a significant role for civic participation. More accountable, transparent, responsive and inclusive institutions allow for a higher level of civic activism, while more capable and professional civil society organizations (CSOs) make a more meaningful and lasting impact on the community affairs by identifying the real priorities and working/cooperating more effectively with other stakeholders (local government, private sector, etc.) for addressing them.

The research findings have also indicated that international assistance, in particular, capacity building directed to improvement of democracy and good governance outcomes, has been an important factor determining the level of civic participation in the communities. It was found that the citizens of the communities involved in capacity building projects were more civically active and knowledgeable about rights and other legal issues, as well as had more connections and collaborated more with local self-governance bodies, CSOs and businesses in the solution of their community problems. It is noteworthy, that in 4 of out of the 5 communities that reported availability of an active CBO, the latter had been established within the framework of an international project.

Inquiry into availability, stocks and types of social capital in Armenia, based on (1) Group membership, (2) trust and solidarity, (3) collective action, (4) information and communication, (5) inclusion and empowerment, and (6) agency capacity of the community leader, has established that social capital, especially the bonding type of it, which is most often associated with survival needs, is present in Armenia. However, its stocks appear to vary significantly from one community to another. Close ties with family and friends, created self-help groups and collective organization of hay-making, harvest gathering and taking cattle to the pastures and back on rotation basis, as well as selling goods to community members in credit have been found to be quite common in most of the researched communities and testify to the existence of social capital.

It has been also found that linking/bridging social capital is most conductive to civic participation. Furthermore, based on the research findings, it has been suggested that civic engagement and the linking/bridging type of social capital mutually-reinforce each other and can result in more of

each, yielding both types of benefits - individual and communal. It has been discussed that as a result of their civic participation, community members enriched not only their human capital – acquiring knowledge and experience, but also increased their social capital – established new connections and made new acquaintances, which resulted in improvement of their career opportunities, as well as new projects for their communities. Hence, it has been suggested that the direction of causality between civic participation and social capital can go in both ways.

On the basis of the argument, it can be inferred that strategies specifically aimed at increasing the stocks of linking/bridging types of social capital in the communities can increase the opportunities for civic participation and generation of more social capital in the communities.

This chapter has argued that Civic or Democratic Citizenship education is one of the most critical factors influencing civic participation in the Armenian context. Research into the quality and practice of civic education in the country has shed light on the registered progress and the existing gaps, and mapped the opportunities for improvement of the current situation.

Assessment of the quality of civic education classes that have been introduced into the middle school curriculum from 1999- 2003, and are currently being taught in the 9th grade of the public schools across the country, has revealed a number of shortcomings, including lack of teaching materials, limited training opportunities for the teachers, use of outdated teaching methods, lack of connection of the material with everyday life of the students and little or no involvement of the school and the community in the learning process, as well as lack of educational visits and study tours to the structures/institutions being studied as a part of the course.

Based on the needs outlined by the research, and taking into account the importance of civic education in the democratizing context of Armenia, it has been proposed to start teaching civic education basics at en earlier stage (elementary or early middle school), as well as introducing civic education lessons in higher educational establishments, and organizing regular seminars and courses for adults, who could fill the gap in their (soviet or early post-soviet time) education and learn about Democratic citizenship at any age. The need to prepare civic education teachers at Universities has been emphasized, and as a measure that has a strong potential to contribute to democratization, it has been suggested to make Civic or Democratic citizenship education mandatory for high-level officials working in public institutions.

The chapter has also presented and discussed the results of the Survey on ICT use for civic participation that has been conducted in the three larger cities of Armenia (Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor) in 2013, with the purpose of studying and analyzing the ICT use habits among the youth and assessing the extent to which ICT currently serves as a tool for civic participation. The Survey results have demonstrated that along with Internet penetration in the country (55% in 2015 according to Freedom House), Internet use has been growing rapidly among the youth. In 2013, 74% of the respondents indicated using Internet on daily basis, and 19% - several times a week. E-mail, social networking and accessing news online have been mentioned as the most common purposes of Internet use. Facebook has been indicated as the most frequently used social networking site (34%), followed by the Russian "Odnoklassniki" (classmates) (19%). 72.2% of the respondents have indicated using Internet for accessing news online. Local newspapers and TV channels have been mentioned as the most popular online media among the respondents, which can be considered an importance advancement and move away from the previously more traditional media, such as TV, radio or press, especially given the evidence that the latter are controlled by the government. Since Internet has been evaluated as "Free" in Armenia (Freedom House 2015), it currently provides a good opportunity for accessing alternative media and learning different viewpoints or takes on the events happening in the country and around the world.

Writing comments in blogs, forums and online media (30%), consulting/accessing information on public agency websites (30%) and websites of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (36%), communicating online with public agencies (10.6%) and NGOs (14.4%), participating in online causes, petitions, campaigns or other civic initiatives (32%), as well as initiating/starting an online campaign or a civic initiative (11.1%) have been other measured by the survey indicators of online civic activism, the obtained results of which have demonstrated that ICT has already become an essential medium for civic engagement in Armenia. However, its possibilities can be further expanded and improved to allow a broader and more meaningful 'e-participation' by all the layers of the population. Further improvement of the e-governance opportunities in the country, as well as bridging the 'democratic and digital divides' by increasing civic knowledge and capacity of the people to participate online, and continuing to improve accessibility of ICT could be important steps in that direction.

# CHAPTER 6. CIVIC HEALTH AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION TRENDS IN ARMENIA

## *6.1. Introduction*

With the view of capturing the situation with civic participation and civic health in the country and assessing the current trends, "Civic Health" questionnaire has been administered in a randomly selected higher educational establishment in the capital city of Yerevan and two other larger cities of Armenia – Gyumri and Vanadzor in 2013. In each city, 50 (fifty) questionnaires have been distributed for completion to the graduate level students[43], making the total number of the distributed questionnaires 150 (one hundred and fifty).

I have visited each of the Universities, have identified a contact person from the staff beforehand or during the visit, introduced myself and the goal of this research and asked for their support by distributing the questionnaires to their students and requesting them to complete them. Additionally, each questionnaire form contained a brief presentation of the research goals, promise of anonymity of the respondents and expression of gratitude for their honest and accurate responses and cooperation. (A copy of the questionnaire form is translated into English and is presented in the Annex 4.) The contact persons (all three of them were lecturers at the respective universities) appeared to be very responsible, as all fifty questionnaire forms have been received back completed from each university.

The same questionnaire form (50 copies, out of which 47 were received back completed this time) has been administered a year later, in 2014, at the same University in the capital city of Yerevan. (Because of limited resources, the questionnaire form in 2014 has been administered only in the capital, leaving out the other cities.)

The following section presents and discusses the results of both surveys, with the aim of providing a comprehensive picture of the situation with civic health and current trends in civic participation among the youth in Armenia.

To enable measuring and comparison of civic participation and its trends, the chapter introduces an innovative tool – Civic Participation score (CP Score), which allows calculation of an index –

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[43] Master students in their 5th year of studies at the University

referred to as Civic Participation Index (CP Index), instrumental for tracking and monitoring the changes in the civic health and civic participation trends over time.

## 6.2. Measuring Civic Participation

As it was presented in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, NCOC's 'Civic Health' indicators have been adapted for use in Armenia. Five main categories of indicators have been used to measure civic health and to compute a Civic Participation Score and Index for the purposes of comparison and analysis of trends in civic participation. The indicator categories with their separate indicators and sub-indicators are presented in the Table 9 below.

*Table 9: Main Indicator Categories for Measuring Civic Participation in Armenia*

| 1 | **Community Service/Volunteering**<br><br>- Volunteering formally (through organization) or informally (helping a neighbour, fixing a common problem in the community, etc.)<br>- Number of times participated in a volunteering action during last 2 months<br>- Number of times participated in a volunteering action during the last year<br>- Number of times became an initiator of a volunteer action in the community during the last 2 months<br>- Number of times became an initiator of a volunteer action in the community during the last year |
|---|---|
| 2 | **Participation in a Group/Belonging to an Organization**<br><br>- Membership in an organization (CSOs: registered or non-registered, unions, associations, etc.)<br>- Type of organization<br>- Years in organization |
| 3 | **Receiving and Spreading Information (Including via ICT) on Current News and Events**<br><br>- Watching news on TV; Frequency: every day, often, sometimes, seldom<br>- Listening to the radio; Frequency: every day, often, sometimes, seldom<br>- Reading newspapers; Frequency: every day, often, sometimes, seldom<br>- Accessing/reading news on Internet; Frequency: every day, often, sometimes, seldom<br>- Discussing news with family, friends, neighbours; Frequency: every day, often, sometimes, seldom |

| | |
|---|---|
| | - Spreading/sharing news on social networking (SNSs) and other sites; Frequency: every day, often, sometimes, seldom |
| 4 | **Political and Civic Action, Including Online Political and Civic Activism**<br><br>- Voting during elections; Last time voted in elections (year)<br>- Involvement in Campaigns, Causes, Social Movements; Number of times involved in campaigns, causes, social movements, during last 2 months, during last year<br>- Involvement in Demonstrations; Number of times involved in demonstrations during last year<br>- Participation in meetings where local problems are discussed; Number of times, participated during last 2 months, during last year<br>- Writing letters to officials, requesting written information regarding responsibilities, rights, or appealing, etc.; Number of times wrote a letter during last 2 months, during last year<br>- Using online media including SNSs to participate in online campaigns and causes; Number of times participated during last year<br>- Using online media, including SNSs, to initiated online campaigns and causes; Number of times initiated a campaign or cause during last year |
| 5 | **Donating to Causes, Charitable or Voluntary Organizations**<br><br>- Number of times donated during last year |

To enable assessment of the situation with civic participation in Armenia and comparison across cities and countries, as well as monitoring of the changes in civic participation over a certain period of time, civic participation indicators have been operationalized and conditional weights have been assigned for each type of response according to each indicator and sub-indicator, wherever relevant. The value 100.00 (one hundred) has been chosen to represent the maximum civic participation score.

Table 10 presents the maximum weights assigned to each category of the indicators.

*Table 10: Weights Assigned to Each Category of Indicators for Measuring Civic Participation in Armenia*

| N | Category of Indicators | Maximum Weight for the Category |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Community Service/Volunteering | 10 |
| 2 | Participation in a Group/ Belonging to an Organization | 10 |
| 3 | Spreading/Sharing Information/News, including via ICT | 20 |
| 4 | Political and Civic Action, including Online Political and Civic Activism | 50 |
| 5 | Donating to Causes, Charity | 10 |

Weights have been also assigned to each indicator and sub-indicator within each category, based on their importance (weight) within the given indicator category, in order to allow for calculation of the civic participation score, hereinafter referred to also as CP Score, for the given category of indicator, as well as the total CP score for the city and the country.

Table 11 presents the relative weights assigned to each indicator and sub-indicator within categories.

To ensure impartiality and maximum accuracy of the weights in representing the importance of the given indicator category with its indicators and sub-indicators, I have discussed them with a number of representatives of NGOs and international organizations working in the sector of civic engagement and democracy promotion in Armenia, as well as the representatives of the Department for Development of the Regional Administration of Lori region, since I was based in Vanadzor during the field research. The final weights represent the opinions (the rounded averages of the given answers), received during the consultations.

*Table 11: Civic Health Indicator Weights by Categories and Sub-Categories*

| N | Indicator | Weight |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Community Service/Volunteering** (Yes=5; No=0) | 5 |
| 1.1 | Frequency: Volunteering Often | 3 |
| | Volunteering Sometimes | 2 |
| | Volunteering Seldom | 1 |
| 1.2 | Times volunteered in last 2 months, if n ≥1 | 0.5 |
| 1.3 | Times volunteered last year, if n ≥2 | 0.5 |
| 1.4 | Times initiated a volunteer action in last 2 months, if n ≥1 | 0.5 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1.5 | Times initiated a volunteer action last year, if n ≥2 | 0.5 |
| **2** | **Membership in Organization** (Yes=8, No=0) | 8 |
| 2.1 | Types of Org: NGO | 0[44] |
| | CBO | 0 |
| | Union | 0 |
| | Youth/Educational | 0 |
| | Cultural | 0 |
| | Sports | 0 |
| | Religious | 0 |
| | Other | 0 |
| 2.2 | Years in organizations, if n ≥2 | 2 |
| 3 | **Watching News on TV** (Yes=1; No=0) | 1 |
| 3.1 | Frequency: Watching News on TV Every day | 1 |
| | Watching News on TV Often | 0.5 |
| | Watching News on TV Sometimes | 0.3 |
| | Watching News on TV Seldom | 0.1 |
| 4 | **Listening to News on Radio** (Yes=1; No=0) | 1 |
| 4.1 | Frequency: Listening to News on Radio Every day | 1 |
| | Listening to News on Radio Often | 0.5 |
| | Listening to News on Radio Sometimes | 0.3 |
| | Listening to News on Radio Seldom | 0.1 |
| 5 | **Reading Newspapers/Periodicals** (Yes=1; No=0) | 1 |
| 5.1 | Frequency: Reading Newspapers Every day | 1 |
| | Reading Newspapers Often | 0.5 |
| | Reading Newspapers Sometimes | 0.3 |
| | Reading Newspapers Seldom | 0.1 |
| 6 | **Accessing/Reading News on Internet** (Yes=1; No=0) | 1 |
| 6.1 | Frequency: Accessing/Reading News on Internet Every day | 1 |
| | Accessing/Reading News on Internet Often | 0.5 |
| | Accessing/Reading News on Internet Sometimes | 0.3 |
| | Accessing/Reading News on Internet Seldom | 0.1 |
| **7** | **Discussing News with Family, Friends, Neighbours** (Yes=3; No=0) | 3 |

[44] It was decided not to assign any specific weight for each type of the organization, as none could be considered superior to any other, the information was collected mainly for descriptive purposes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7.1 | Frequency: Discussing news with Family, Friends, Neighbours Every Day | 3 |
| | Discussing news with Family, Friends, Neighbours Often | 2 |
| | Discussing news with Family, Friends, Neighbours Sometimes | 1 |
| | Discussing news with Family, Friends, Neighbours Seldom | 0.5 |
| 8 | **Spreading/Sharing news via Social Networking (SN) and other sites (blogs, forums, etc.)** (Yes=3; No=0) | 3 |
| 8.1 | Frequency: Sharing news via SN and other sites Every Day | 3 |
| | Sharing news via SN and other sites Often | 2 |
| | Sharing news via SN and other sites Sometimes | 1 |
| | Sharing news via SN and other sites Seldom | 0.5 |
| 9 | **Voting** (Yes=8; No=0) | 8 |
| 9.1 | Voting in Presidential elections 2013 | 2 |
| | Voting in Parliamentary Elections 2012 | 1 |
| | Other | 0 |
| 10 | **Involvement in Causes, Campaigns, Movements** (Yes=8; No=0) | 8 |
| 10.1 | Times involved in Campaigns, Causes, Movements in last 2months, if n≥1 | 1 |
| 10.2 | Times involved in Campaigns, Causes, Movements last year, if n≥2 | 1 |
| 11 | **Participation in Demonstrations** (Yes=8; No=0) | 8 |
| 11.1 | Times participated in Demonstrations last year, if n ≥1 | 2 |
| 12 | **Participation in Meetings where local problems are discussed** (Yes=3; No=0) | 3 |
| 12.1 | Times participated in meeting where local problem is discussed n in last 2 months, if n≥1 | 1 |
| 12.2 | Times participated in meeting where local problem is discussed, if n ≥ 2 | 1 |
| 13 | **Contacting Officials for Info or Appealing** (Yes=3; No=0) | 3 |
| 13.1 | Times contacted officials for info or appealed in last 2 months, if n≥1 | 1 |
| 13.2 | Times contacted officials for info or appealed last year, if n≥2 | 1 |
| 14 | **Participation in online (including via SNS) campaigns, causes** (Yes=3; No=0) | 3 |
| 14.1 | Times participated in online, including via SNSs, campaigns, causes in last 2 months, if n>=1 | 1 |
| 14.2 | Times participated in online, including via SNSs, campaigns, causes last year, if n ≥2 | 1 |
| 15 | **Initiating campaigns and causes using online media, including SNSs** (Yes=3; No=0) | 3 |
| 15.1 | Times initiated campaigns and causes using online media, including SNSs in last 2 months, if n ≥1 | 1 |
| 15.2 | Times initiated campaigns and causes using online media, including SNSs in last year, if n≥2 | 1 |

| 16 | **Donating to voluntary organizations, charity, causes or campaigns** (Yes=5; No=0) | 5 |
|---|---|---|
| 16.1 | Times donated to voluntary organizations, charity, causes or campaigns last year, if n ≥2 | 5 |

While the Indicator Categories 1, 2 and 5 (categories are separated by black bold line in the table above) do not have any sub-categories, the Indicator Category 3 (Accessing and Spreading Information and News, Including via Internet) has 6 sub-categories with their respective indicators, and Indicator Category 4 (Political and Civic Activism, Including Online Activism) has 7 sub-categories with their indicators.

The sum of each indicator weight, based on the respondent's answer, has been computed, and an average of all the total weights is taken to represent the Total CP Score:

$$V = \frac{1}{n} * \sum_{i=1}^{n} w_i$$

Where, $V$ – is the Total CP Score, $n$ is the total number of respondents, $i$ is the ID number of each respondent, $W_i$ is the weight received as a result of $i$ respondent's answer to each indicator.

For indicator categories that have more than one sub-category $W_i = \sum_{j=1}^{k} w_{ij}$

where, $k$ is the quantity of sub-categories, $j$ is the (ID) number of sub-category.
Additionally, CP Score for each indicator category ($V_{cat}$) has been calculated:

$$V_{cat} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} \sum_{j=1}^{k} w_{ij}}{n}$$

where, $i$ is the (ID) number of respondent, $W_{ij}$ is the weight of the $i$ respondent's answer to each indicator, $j$ is the (ID) number of sub-category, $k$ is the quantity of sub-categories, and $n$ is the total number of respondents.

Civic Participation Index (CP Index), showing the difference between the CP Score - by categories and the total, has been calculated to provide a better understanding of the trends in civic participation in Yerevan and to allow tracking the changes.
To calculate the CP index by categories ($Z_{cat}$)

$$Z_{cat} = \frac{S_2 V_{cat}}{S_1 V_{cat}} * 100$$

Where $S_2V_{cat}$ is the CP Score for each indicator category received during the 2nd survey ($S_2$ - year 2014), and $S_1V_{cat}$ is the CP Score for each indicator category received during the 1st survey ($S_1$ - year 2013).

Total CP Index (Z) has been computed, using the following formula:

$$Z = \frac{S_2 V}{S_1 V} * 100$$

where, $S_2V$ is the total Civic Participation Score received as a results of Survey 2 (year 2014), and $S_1V$ is the Civic Participation Score received as a result of Survey 1 (year 2013).

SPSS[45] software has been used for the analysis of the survey responses.

## 6.3. *'Civic Health' Survey Results*

The total CP score for the three cities surveyed in 2013, is **37.91** out of 100.00, which, as it has been expected, indicates a rather moderate level of civic participation.

Calculated separately for each city: CP scores for Yerevan is 33.57, Gyumri – 41.26, Vanadzor – 38.81.

*Table 12: Civic Participation Scores for Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor Cities in 2013*

| CP Total | CP Yerevan | CP Gyumri | CP Vanadzor |
|----------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| **37.91** | 33.57 | 41.26 | 38.81 |

It is noteworthy, that the total CP Score for Yerevan is the lowest among the three cities, while the CP Score for Gyumri is the highest.

Nevertheless, the results of the survey conducted in 2014 in Yerevan, indicate a considerable increase in civic participation – **43.24** out of 100.00, as compared to **33.57** a year earlier.

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[45] Software Package for Statistical Analysis

*Table 13: Civic Participation Score, Yerevan, 2013 and 2014*

| CP Score Yerevan 2013 | CP Score Yerevan 2014 |
|:---:|:---:|
| **33.57** | **43.24** |

While a general upward trend in civic participation has been noted also during the surveys conducted in the communities, this significant increase in civic activism could also be ascribed to the campaigns and rallies – the civic initiatives that took place at the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014. The movements and the protests have been presented in more detail in Chapter 4.

Civic Participation scores for separate indicator categories increased from Survey 1 to Survey 2 (comparing the results between the capital Yerevan data of 2013 and 2014), including considerable increase in *Political and civic activism* and *Donations*.

The Civic Participation scores for separate indicator categories are presented in Table 14.

*Table 14: Civic Participation Scores by Categories*

| N | Category of Indicators | Max | CP 2013 (37.91) | CP Yerevan 2013 (33.57) | CP Gyumri 2013 (41.26) | CP Vanadzor 2013 (38.81) | CP Yerevan 2014 (43.24) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Community Service/Volunteering | 10 | 4.49 | 4.29 | 5.14 | 5.39 | 4.31 |
| 2 | Belonging to an Organization | 10 | 2.40 | 1.10 | 3.04 | 3.04 | 1.28 |
| 3 | Spreading/Sharing Information/News, including via ICT | 20 | 13.30 | 13.92 | 13.12 | 12.88 | 13.18 |
| 4 | Political and Civic Action, including Online Political and | 50 | 13.13 | 11.55 | 13.88 | 13.98 | 19.39 |

| | Civic Activism | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | Donating to Causes, Charity | 10 | 4.21 | 2.90 | 4.50 | 3.77 | 5.00 |

For visualization of the CP scores within each indicator category, please, refer to Figure 12

*Figure 12: Composition of Civic Participation Score by Indicator Categories*
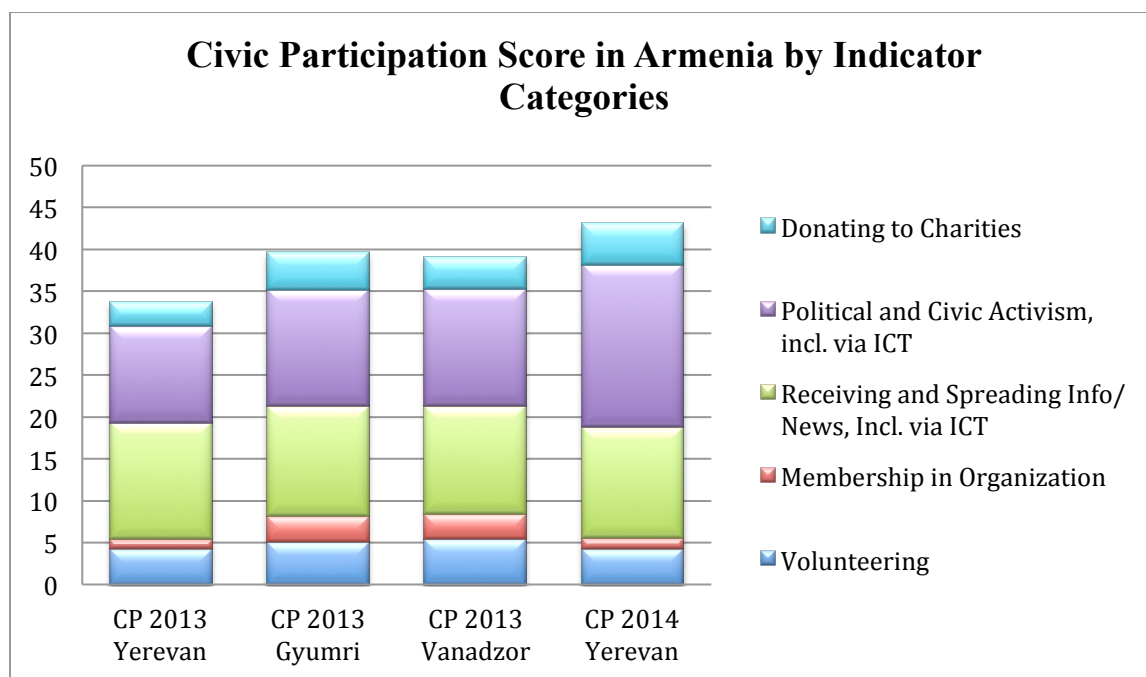


### Indicator Category 1: Volunteering, formally and Informally

The Survey 1 data indicate that among the three cities, the youth in the cities of Vanadzor and Gyumri have been volunteering more that the youth in the capital of Yerevan.

In 2013, 62% of the respondents answered positively to the question whether they volunteer (formally or informally), the breakdown for the three cities is as follows: Yerevan – 56%, Gyumri – 64%, Vanadzor- 66%.

In 2014, 55.3% of the respondents answered positively to the question about volunteering, which is a slight decline from the results of 2013 – 56%.

*Figure 13: Volunteering: Survey 1 and Survey 2 Results*
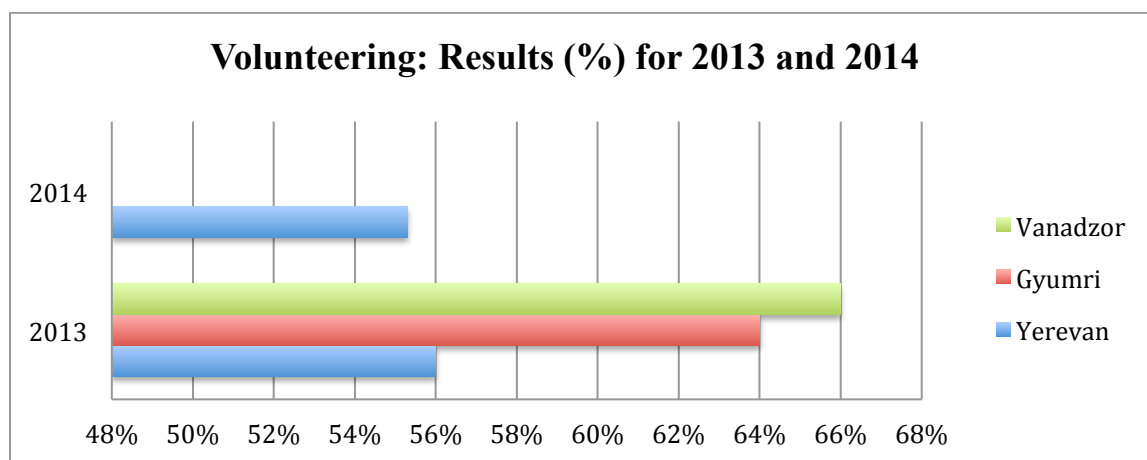


In 2013, 16% of the respondents reported volunteering 'Often', 34% - 'Sometimes', and 11.3% - 'Seldom'. On average, the respondents reported volunteering 1.53 times during the previous 2 months (62% volunteered 1 or more times), and 6.54 times – during the previous year (96.5% volunteered 1 or more times).

To the question about participation in a volunteer actions during the pervious 2 months – 31% of the respondents answered positively; whereas 51% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question about initiating volunteer activity during the previous year; 19% - initiated 1 action, 5.8% - 2, and 9.3% - 3 actions.

Comparing the data for the capital city of Yerevan in 2013 and 2014, the average frequency of volunteering is 3.0 and 2.81 respectively.

In 2013, 21.4% of the respondents reported volunteering 'Often', 32% - 'Sometimes', and 21.4%-'Seldom'. 2014 data indicate some decline in volunteering: only 6.4% of the respondents reported volunteering 'Often', 31.9% - 'Sometimes', and 17% - 'Seldom'.

***Indicator Category 2: Membership in Organizations***

In 2013, 26% of the respondents reported belonging to an organization. The largest percentage of the respondents - 11.3% indicated that they belonged to an NGO, and 10% - to a Youth/Educational organization.

*Figure 14: Membership in Organization, 2013 Survey*
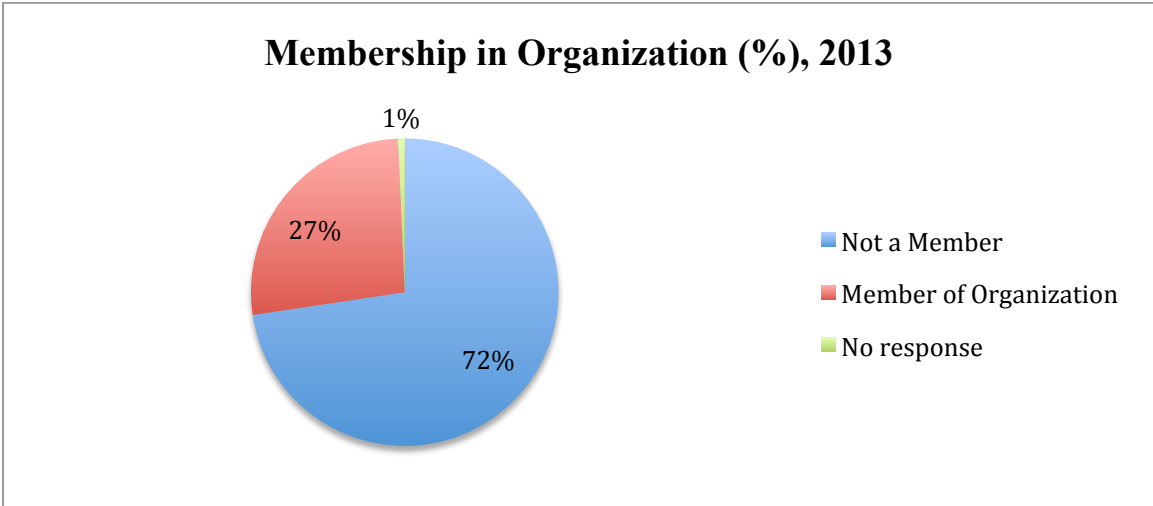


Data for the three cities and Yerevan in 2014 Survey are presented in the Figure 15.

*Figure 15: Membership in Organization*
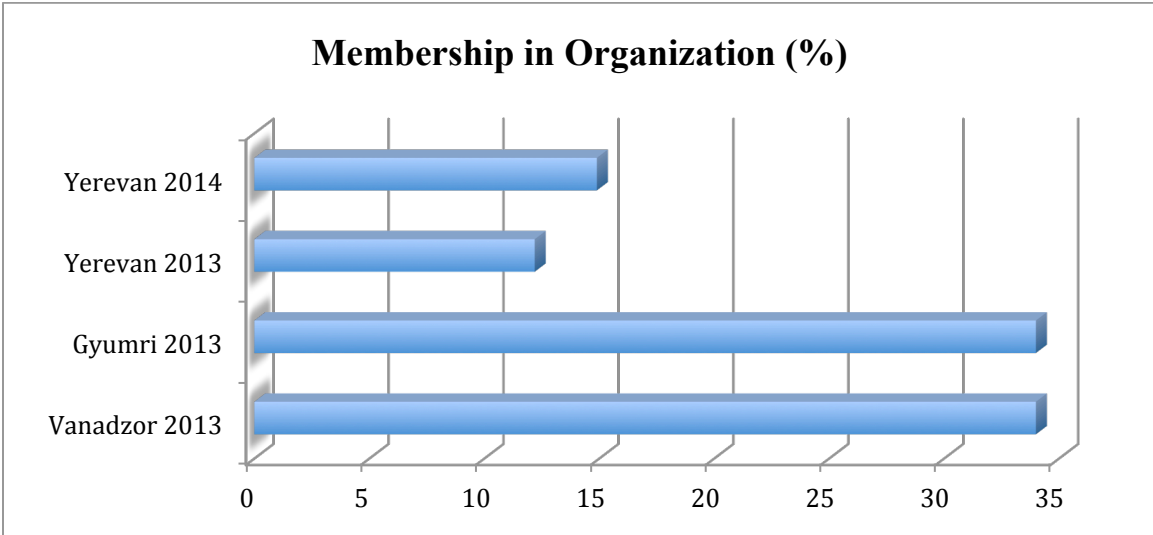


It is peculiar, that the survey results indicate that in the smaller cities of Vanadzor and Gyumri, more youth belongs to an organization (34% in cases of Gyumri and Vanadzor), while in Yerevan, only 12.2% of the respondents indicated belonging to an organization. The number increased somewhat in 2014, becoming 15%.

*Figure 16: Membership by Type of Organization*
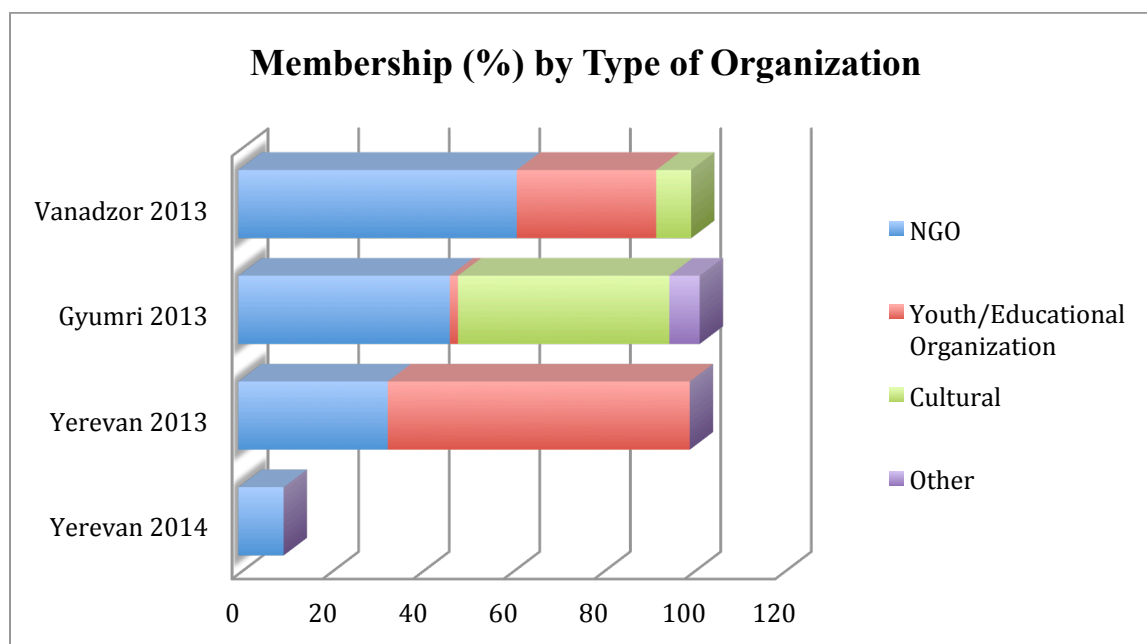


In Gyumri, 14% of the respondents reported belonging to an NGO, 14% - to a Youth/Educational organization, and 2% - to a union. In Vanadzor, 16% reported belonging to an NGO, 8% - to a Youth/Educational organization, and 2% - to a Cultural Organization. In Yerevan, 4% of the respondents indicated belonging to an NGO, and 8% - to a Youth/Educational organization in 2013, and 10% - belonging to an NGO in 2014.

In Yerevan, on average, the respondents indicated 1.5 years of membership in an organization in both 2013 and 2014. In Gyumri, the average years in an organization were 1.8, in Vanadzor – 1.6. Given the age of the respondents, for most of those belonging to an organization, 1 or 2 years of membership were typical, with the maximum years indicated as 6 in one case.

***Category 3: Receiving, Spreading and Sharing Information/News, including via ICT***

In Survey 1 (year 2013), 92% of the respondents answered positively to the question whether they watch news on TV; 45% indicated watching news on daily basis, and 30.4% - 'Often'.

In Yerevan, 98% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question about watching news on TV, out of which, 67.5% watch news 'Every day', 20.4% - 'Often', 10.2% - 'Sometimes', and 2.2%- 'Seldom'. Compared to Yerevan, in Gyumri and Vanadzor the percentage of respondents

who provided a positive answer to the question about watching news on TV is slightly lower-92% and 86% respectively.

In Survey 2 (2014), 95.7% of the respondents indicated watching news on TV, out of which, 51% watch TV 'Every day', 22.2% - 'Often', 15.6%- 'Sometimes', 11.1% - 'Seldom'.

As to listening to news on radio, the results of 2013 survey indicate that 31% of the respondents provided a positive answer. However, in case of breaking up the results by cities, it appears, that in the capital of Yerevan, the percentage of people who listen to news on radio is significantly higher than in the smaller cities of Gyumri and Vanadzor. This difference can be explained by abundance of radio stations in the capital, against a few ones in the smaller cities.

In Yerevan, 54% of the respondents indicated listening to news on radio in 2013 survey. In Gyumri - 16% of the respondents indicated listening to news on radio, and in Vanadzor -12%.

In 2014 survey, in Yerevan, 48% of the respondents indicated listening to news on radio: 10.6% - 'Every day', 12.8% - 'Often', 10.4% - 'Sometimes'. While listening to *news* on radio has been specified, as it has been earlier mentioned, radio in Armenia mostly represents a source of entertainment, with the majority of the radio stations transmitting music.

To the question regarding reading news in printed press, in 2013, 75.3% of the respondents answered positively. 12.7% - read newspapers 'Every day', 24% - 'Often', and 27.3% - 'Sometimes'. Data for Yerevan indicate that 82% of the respondents read newspapers: 14% read 'Every day', 18% - 'Often', and 34% - 'Sometimes'. In Gyumri, 74% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question about reading newspapers: 14% - read 'Every day', 34% - 'Often', and 18% - 'Sometimes'. In Vanadzor, 70% of the respondents read newspapers: 10% - read 'Every day', 20%- 'Often', and 30% - 'Sometimes'.
In 2014, 78.7% of the respondents indicated reading newspapers: 10.6% read 'Every day', 38.3%-'Often', and 8.5% - 'Sometimes'.

These results are significantly higher than those indicated by other studies (typically 5-10%) (Pearce 2011 and other sources) however, this higher percentage of printed media readership can be ascribed to the fact that all the respondents were students in the 5th year of studies at a University and, consequently, would have had a better access to printed media, which is typically available for common use in the university libraries.

Internet appeared to be as popular a means of accessing news and information as TV. While it is understandable that this trend could not be true about the older generation of people in the country who, as the focus groups results have indicated, still prefer television for ease and convenience of use (no typing, searching or knowledge of English is required), it appears, the youth uses Internet for receiving information and accessing news more often than TV.

In 2013, 95.3% of the respondents indicated accessing news on Internet: 56.7% did so on daily basis, 26% - 'Often', and 10% - 'Sometimes'.

The data for Yerevan in 2013 indicate that 94% of the respondents access news on Internet: 52% - 'Every day', 24% - 'Often', and 18% - 'Sometimes'.

In Gyumri, 94% of the respondents indicated accessing news on Internet: 58% - on daily basis, and 26%- 'Often'. In Vanadzor, 98% of respondents answered positively: 60%- access Internet for news on daily basis, and 28% - 'Often'.

In 2014, the percentage of the respondents who answered positively was 91%: 53% indicated accessing Internet 'Every day', and 23%- 'Often'.

The findings of both of the surveys (2013 and 2014) are consistent with those indicated by Freedom House (2015)- more than 90% of the youth accesses news via internet on regular basis.

The results also demonstrate that accessing Internet for news is not a prerogative for the capital's youth, the rates of Internet use for accessing news are even slightly higher among the youth in the cities of Gyumri and Vanadzor.

The 2013 survey results indicate that 90.7% of the respondents discuss news with their families and friends. 28% - discuss news 'Every day', 42% - 'Often' and 18% - 'Sometimes'. The breakdown for the three cities is as follows:

In Yerevan (2013), 92% of the respondents discuss news: 34% - 'Every day', 42% - 'Often', and 14% - 'Sometimes'. In Gyumri, 94% of the respondents discuss news: 26% - discuss news 'Every day', 44% - 'Often', and 26% - 'Sometimes'. In Vanadzor, 86% discuss news: 24% - discuss news 'Every day', 40% - 'Often', and 18% - 'Sometimes'.

In 2014, in Yerevan, 95.7% of the respondents reported discussing news with family and friends: 12.8% - discussed news 'Every day', 31.9% - 'Often', and 44.7% - 'Sometimes'.

As it has been expected, discussing news is very common among the Armenian people – culture and strong ties to their families (typically, having dinner together every day) significantly contribute to sharing and discussing information and news together.

Additionally, relatively short distances even in the largest city – the capital Yerevan, make it possible to frequently meet and have discussions with friends. Observations and focus group meeting results also testify to the fact that discussion of politics and current events taking place in the country and around the globe is a very typical and accepted pastime in Armenia.

To the question about spreading information and news online, including via Social networking sites (SNS), 73.3% of the respondents of the Survey 1 answered positively. 41.3% indicated spreading information via ICT 'Every day', 22% - 'Often', and 5.3% - 'Sometimes.

Data for Yerevan indicate that 68% of the respondents gave a positive answer to spreading information and news online: 42% - share news 'Every day', 20% - 'Often', and 4% - 'Sometimes'. In Gyumri, 74% of the respondents indicated they shared information and news online. 36% - shared 'Every day', 28%- 'Often', and 2% - 'Sometimes'. In Vanadzor, 78% of the respondents indicated sharing information and news online. 48% share news on daily basis, 18% - 'Often', and 10% - 'Sometimes'. The percentage of the respondents sharing online news and information appears to be higher in the city of Vanadzor, and the lowest results are in the capital Yerevan.

However, Survey 2 results (Yerevan 2014) indicate that 76.6% of respondents gave positive answer to the question about spreading/sharing news online, which is significantly higher than the previous year's result (68%). 21.3% share information and news online 'Every day', 29.8% - share 'Often', and 21.3% - 'Sometimes'. (Figure 17 illustrates the results received during Survey 1.)

*Figure 17: Accessing, Spreading and Sharing News, 2013 Survey results by cities*



**Accessing, Spreading and Sharing News, 2013 Survey Results (%)**
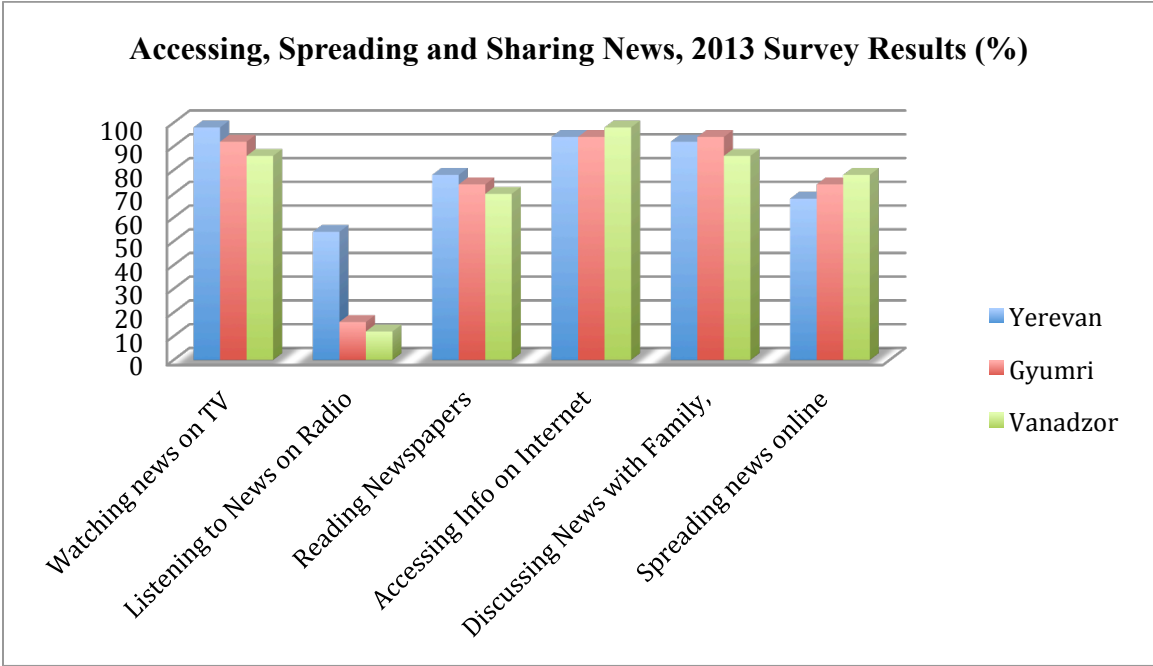
In general, it appears that youth in Armenia is doing quite well on accessing, spreading and sharing news. Among the sources of news, radio audience is rather low, especially in the smaller cities, while Internet access is quite high and spreading news online is becoming increasingly popular among the youth.

(Figure 18 shows the comparison of Survey 1 and 2 results for Yerevan.)

*Figure 18: Accessing, Spreading and Sharing News, Yerevan 2013 and 2014 Results*



**Accessing, Spreading and Sharing News (%)**
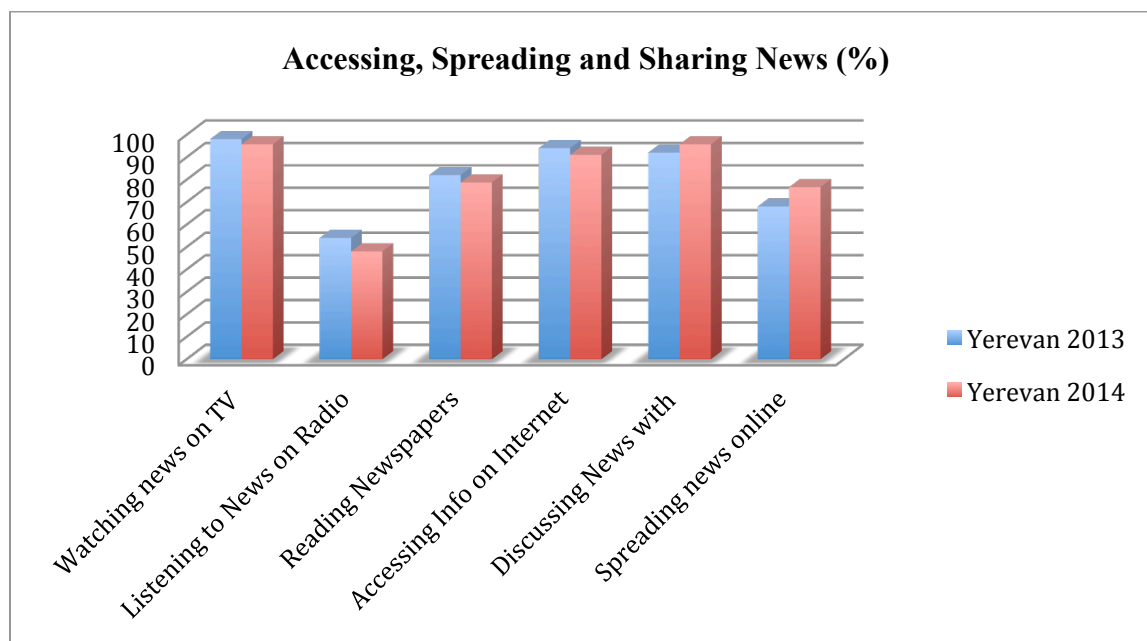
While there was a slight decline in the results for the first 3 indicator categories – accessing news by TV, radio and printed press, the results for the indicators measuring the use of Internet as a source of information and news, as well as sharing news online saw some increase in 2014.

This trend appears to be consistent with and supported by other observations – growing dissatisfaction with the mainly state controlled TV stations, as well as the state censored radio stations and newspapers. Internet in Armenia still appears to be relatively out of the state control zone, and therefore, there is a huge potential for using it as an alternative source of information and news, free from the state or Russia-fed propaganda that have taken over the TV stations.

## Category 4: Political and Civic Action, including Online Political and Civic Activism

Voting

In February 2013, Presidential Elections were held in Armenia, and in May 2013 - Yerevan City Council elections. A year earlier – in May 2012, Parliamentary elections were held in the country. Thus, at the time of the Survey 1, the respondents have just had a chance to take part at least in 1 election that year (for the residents of the capital – 2 elections), and in another – during the previous year.

In 2013 Survey, 78% of the respondents answered positively to the question whether they voted in elections. 68% of the respondents indicated that last time they voted in 2013.

*Figure 19: Voting in Elections*
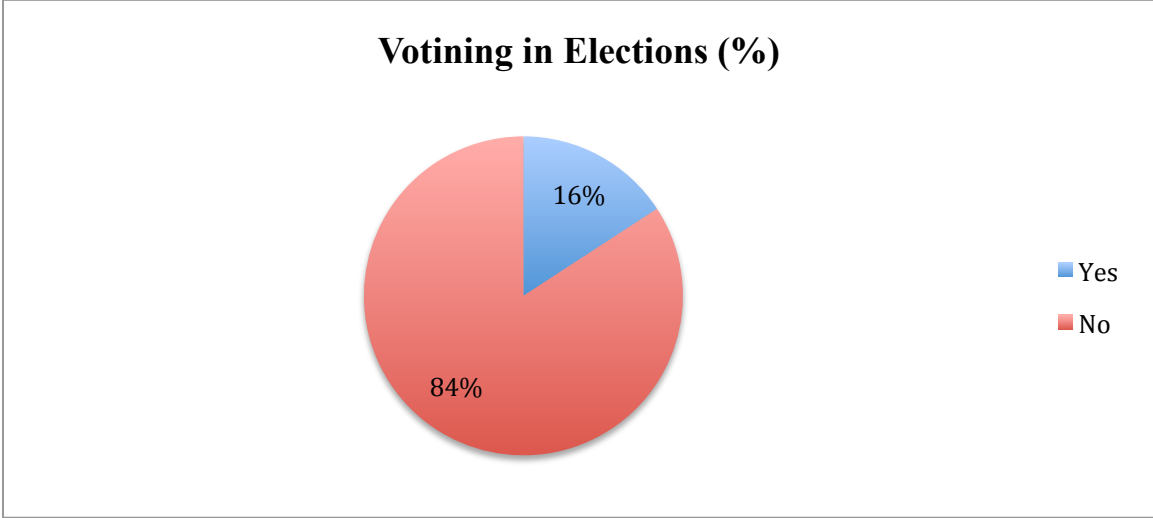


In 2013 Survey, the breakdown by the cities is as follows: in Yerevan, 76% of the respondents answered positively to the question about voting in elections (64% voted in 2013; 6% - in 2012), in Gyumri, 70% of the respondents gave a positive response (68% voted in 2013), and in Vanadzor, 88% of the respondents indicated voting in elections (72% voted in 2013, and 6% - in 2012). The results show that voting rate is the highest in Vanadzor (88%), followed by Yerevan (76%) and Gyumri (70%).

As for Survey 2 results, in 2014, in Yerevan, 78% of the respondents indicated voting in elections, which is almost similar results with the previous year (76%).

In general, voting rates among the youth appear to be quite high through the country. According to the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia, 62.87% voter turnout was registered in May 2012 Parliamentary elections, and 60,18% - in February 2013 Presidential elections in Armenia.

Involvement in Causes, Campaigns, and Social Movements

The Survey 1 results reveal, that in 2013, **14%** of the surveyed youth answered positively to the question about participating in campaigns, causes or social movements. The mean for the number of causes participated during the previous 2 months is 0.94.

4.7% of the respondents indicated involvement in 1 campaign or cause, and 1.3% - in 2. The mean for the causes participated during the previous year by the respondents who gave a positive answer to the question is 2.45.

*Figure 20: Involvement in Causes, Campaigns and Social Movements, 2013 Survey Results*
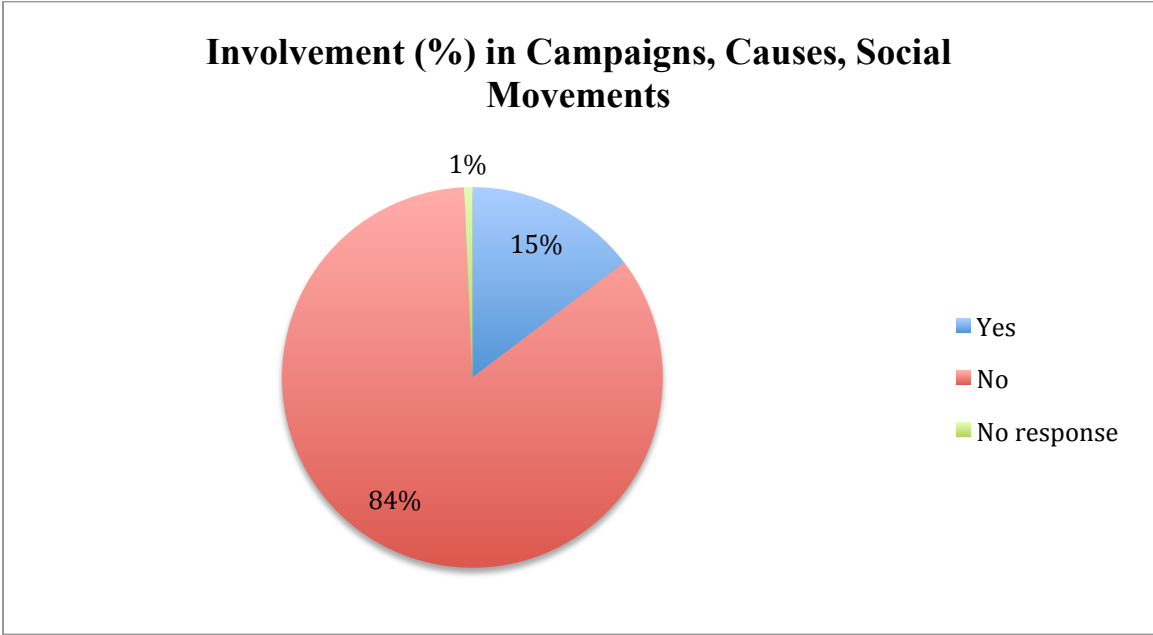


The breakdown results for the three cities are as follows: in Yerevan - 12% of the respondents answered positively to involvement in the campaigns, causes or social movements, in Gyumri-16%, and in Vanadzor – 15.7%.

The comparison of the results for 2013 per city reveals that in Gyumri and Vanadzor involvement in campaigns and causes was slightly higher than in Yerevan.

In Yerevan the average number of times respondents involved in causes and campaigns during the previous 2 months was 1.33, and 2.33 –during the previous year. The maximum number of campaigns involved in the previous 2 months was 5, and for the previous year - 4.

In Gyumri, the average number of times the respondents involved in campaigns or causes was 1.13 – during the previous 2 months, and 3.14 - during the previous year. The maximum number of campaigns respondents involved in during the previous 2 months was 3, and during the previous year- 7. In Vanadzor, the average number of times respondents involved in campaigns or cause was 0.56 – during the previous 2 months, and 2- during the previous year. The maximum

number of campaigns involved in during the previous 2 months was 3, and during the previous year – 5.

The Survey 2 results reveal, that in 2014, **29.8%** of the respondents answered positively to the question about involvement in campaigns, causes or social movements. The mean of the number of campaigns involved in was 1.07 – for the previous 2 months, and 2.94- for the previous year. The maximum number of campaigns involved in during the previous 2 months was 4, and during the previous year - 8. (Figure 21 illustrates the comparison of the results of Survey 1 and 2.)

*Figure 21: Involvement in Causes, Campaigns and Social Movements, 2013 and 2014 Survey Results*
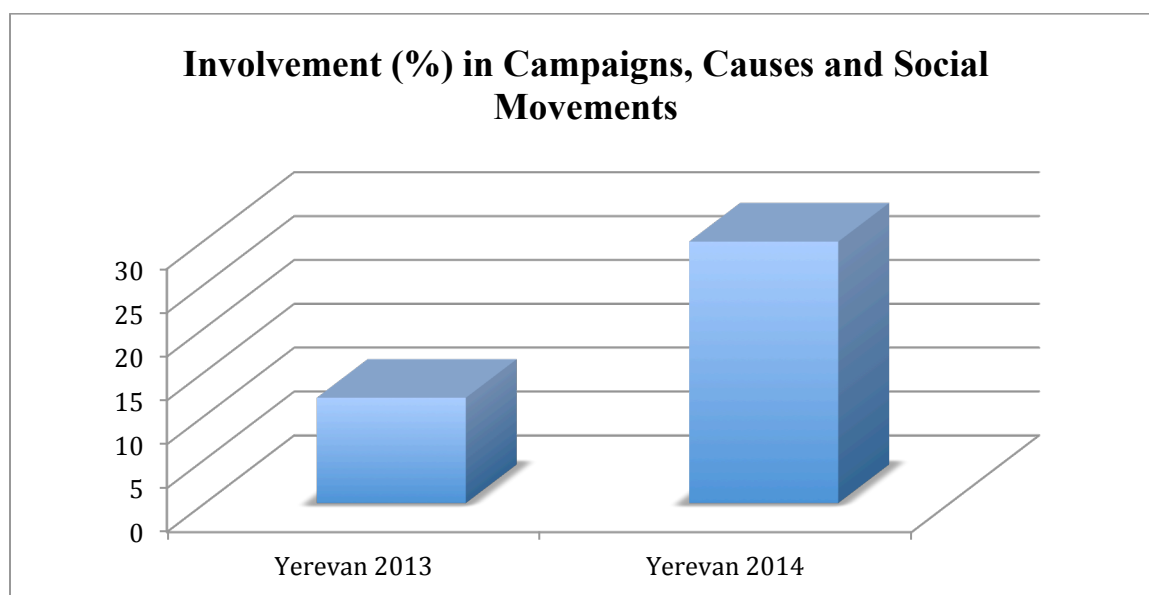


Comparing the results for the capital of Yerevan in 2013 and 2014 reveals a considerable increase in the involvement of the youth in campaigns, cases and social movement – from **12%** to **29.8%**. It is suggested that this impressive increase in participation rates among the youth in Yerevan could be ascribed to the protests that broke up in the capital during 2013-2014 against the decision of the RA Ministry of Transport to increase the public transportation fee ("I will not pay 150 drams" Campaign).

Participation in Demonstrations

In 2013 Survey, **13.3%** of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question whether they participated in demonstrations. 2.7% of them indicated participating in 1, and 6% - in 2 demonstrations during the previous year. The average number of times the respondents had

participated in demonstrations during the previous year was 1.95, and the maximum number of demonstrations participated in was 4.

The breakdown of the data for 3 cities is as follows: Yerevan – 8% participation, average number of demonstrations participated in the previous year – 2.25, maximum – 3 demonstrations.

In Gyumri, 18% of the respondents participated in demonstrations. The mean of the number of times the respondents had participated during the previous year was 1.78, and the maximum number was 3.
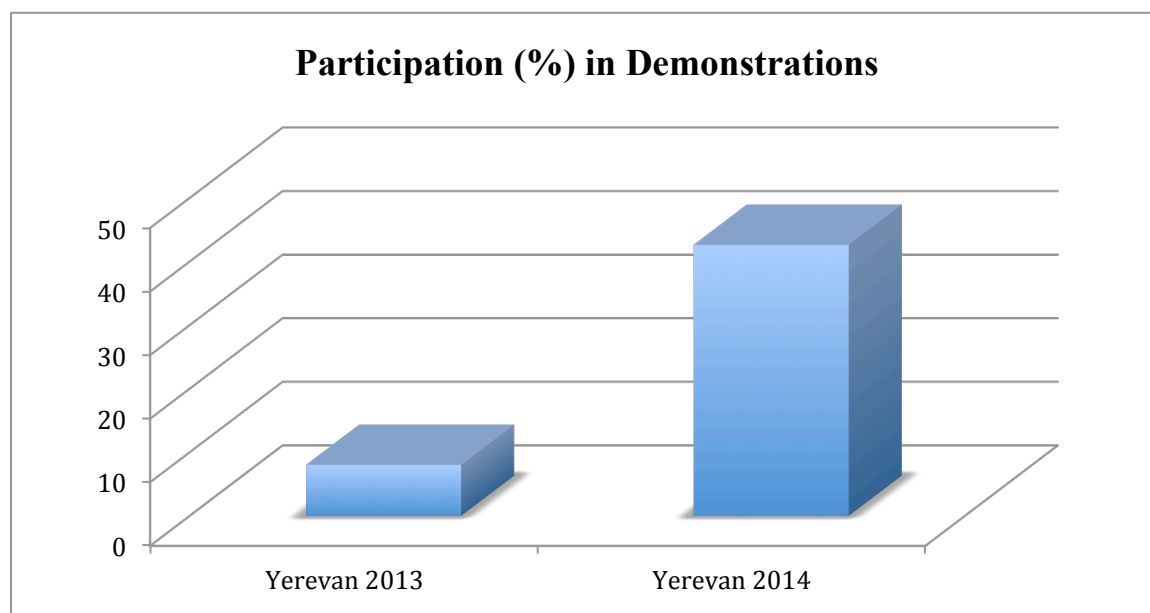
In Vanadzor, only 7% of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question about participation in demonstrations. The mean of the number of demonstrations participated in during the previous year was 2, the maximum number – 4.

It is worth noting that the rate of participation in demonstrations appears to be significantly higher among the youth in Gyumri, while Yerevan and Vanadzor showed a rather low rate of participation in demonstrations.

The results of the Survey 2, however, show a dramatic increase in the participation in demonstrations among the youth in Yerevan: **42.6%** of the respondents gave a positive answer. The mean of the number of the times the respondents had participated in demonstrations during the previous year was 4, the maximum number of demonstrations participated in was 11.

(Figure 22 illustrates the results pertinent to participation in demonstrations, obtained during Survey 1 and Survey 2.)

*Figure 22: Participation in Demonstrations, 2013 and 2014 Survey Results*



**Participation (%) in Demonstrations**

It is suggested that the civic initiatives that took place in Yerevan during 2013-2014 (described in detail in Chapter 4) are responsible for this remarkable increase in the rate of participation in demonstrations among the youth in the capital.

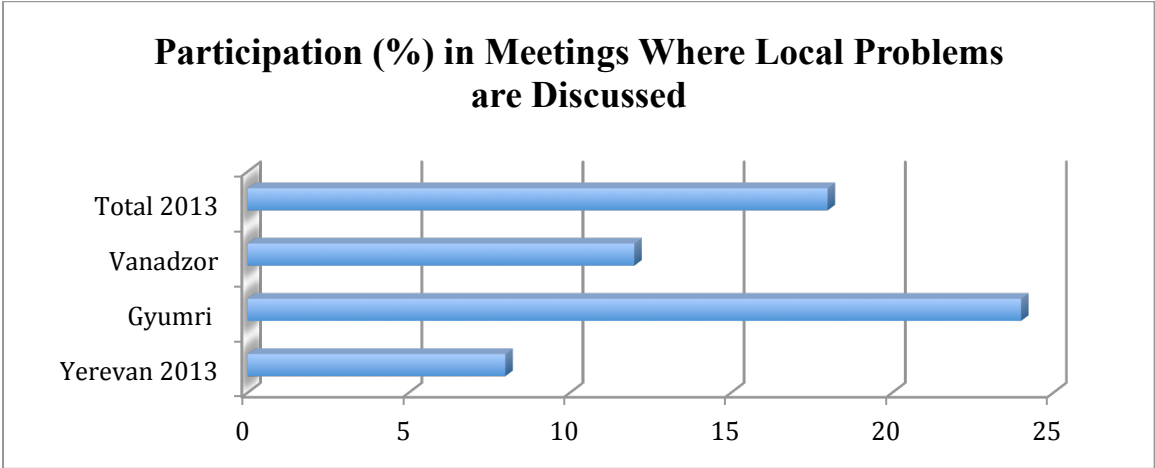Participation in Meetings where local problems are discussed

The results of the Survey 1 reveal that in 2013, **18%** of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question about participating in meetings where local problems were discussed. The average number of meetings participated in during the previous 2 months was 1.6, and during the previous year – 3.44. The maximum number of meetings participated during the previous 2 months was 8, and during the previous year – 11.

The data for Yerevan, in 2013, indicate that only 8% of the respondents participated in meetings where local problems were discussed. In Gyumri, 24% of the respondents provided a positive answer to the question about participation in meetings, and in Vanadzor - 12% of the respondents.

The results for Yerevan in 2014 reveal that **17%** of the respondents participated in meetings where local problems were discussed. The mean of the number participated during the previous 2 months was 1.25, and the mean for the previous year – 2.5. The maximum number of meetings participated in the previous 2 months was 2, and the in previous year – 5.

In 2013 Survey, Yerevan city's results are the lowest - only 8%, while results from Gyumri are significantly higher among the 3 cities – 24%. (Figure 23 illustrates the results obtained from Survey 1). Gyumri's youth appears to be more actively participating in the issues having a bearing on their lives, as compared to the youth in Yerevan and Vanadzor.

*Figure 23: Participation in Meetings where local Problems are Discussed, Survey 1 Results*



The results for Yerevan in 2014, however, show some improvement, with positive answers increasing from 8% to **17%**, thereby, indicating a growing trend in participation in the meetings where local problems are discussed. (Figure 24 illustrates the comparison of results of the Survey 1 and Survey 2.)

*Figure 24: Participation in Meetings where local Problems are Discussed, Survey 1and 2 Results*



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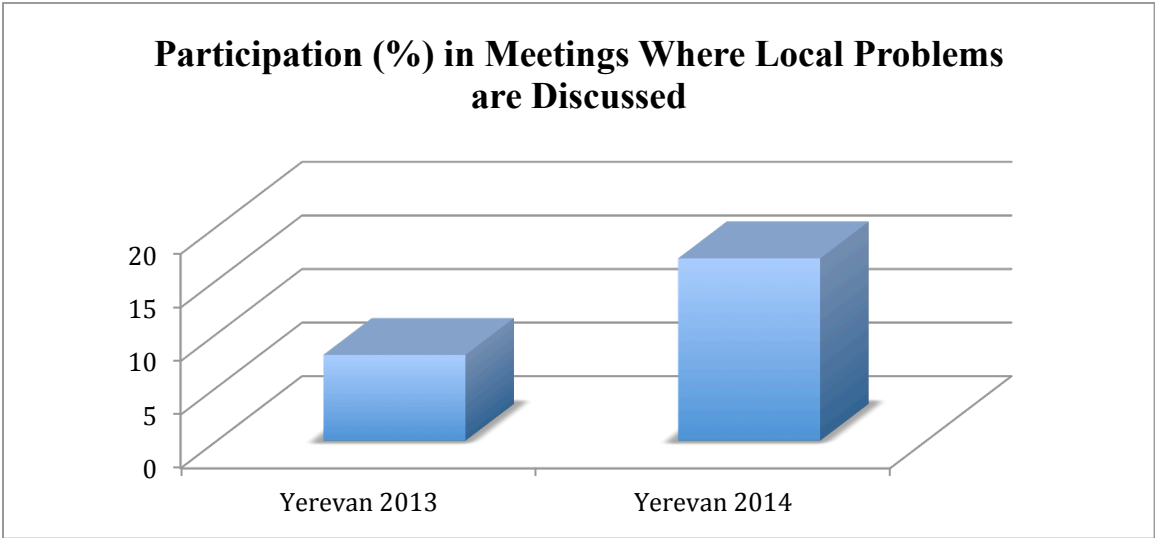
Contacting Officials for Information or Appealing

The Survey 1 results reveal that in 2013, only **6.7%** of the respondents gave a positive answer to the question about contacting any officials for information or appealing a decision.

The percentage of youth who did so appears to be rather low. The average of the times the respondents had contacted an official during the previous 2 months was 0.7, and during the previous year – 1.6. The maximum number of contacts indicated was 2 – over the period of the previous 2 months, and 5- during the previous year.

The breakdown by the three cities is as follows: Yerevan – 6% of the respondents contacted officials; in Gyumri – 8%, and in Vanadzor – 5.9% of the respondents indicated contacting officials for information or appealing a decision.

(Figure 25 illustrates the results of the Survey 1.)

*Figure 25: Contacting Officials for Information or Appealing, Survey 1 Results*
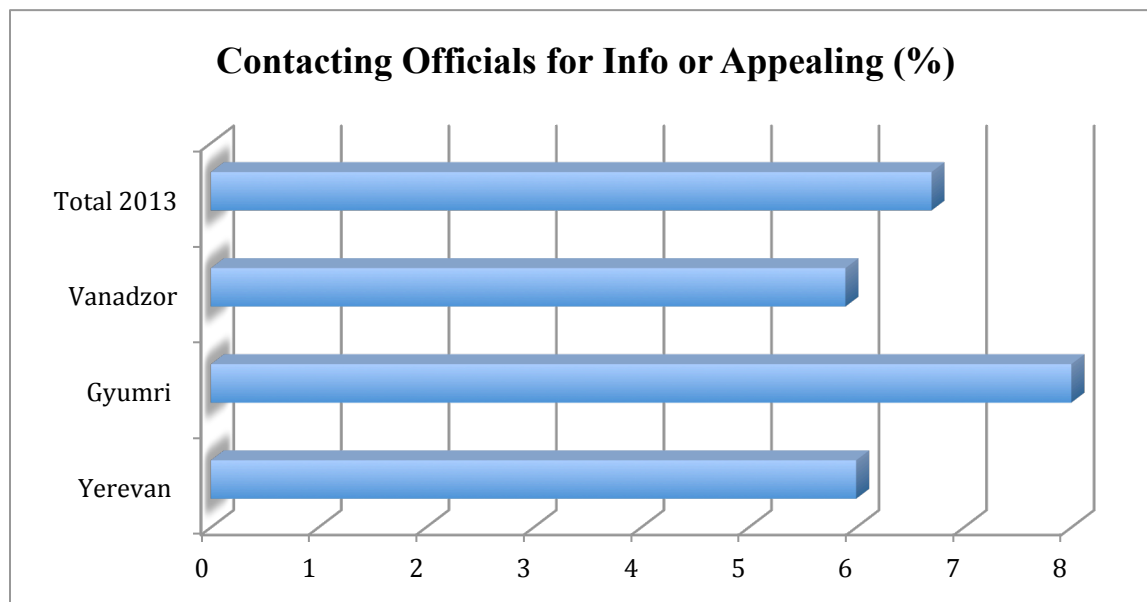


Among the three cities, the youth in Gyumri appears to be contacting the officials slightly more often compared to the youth in Vanadzor and Yerevan.

The Survey 2 results, however, indicate a significant increase in the number of youth contacting officials for information or appealing a decision, the number rose from **6%** to **42.6%**.

This significant increase could be an indicator of improved e-governance in the country and related to it increased responsiveness of the officials toward regular citizens.

(Figure 26 illustrates the comparison of the results obtained from Survey 1 and Survey 2.)

*Figure 26: Contacting Officials for Information and Appealing, Yerevan 2013 and Yerevan 2014*
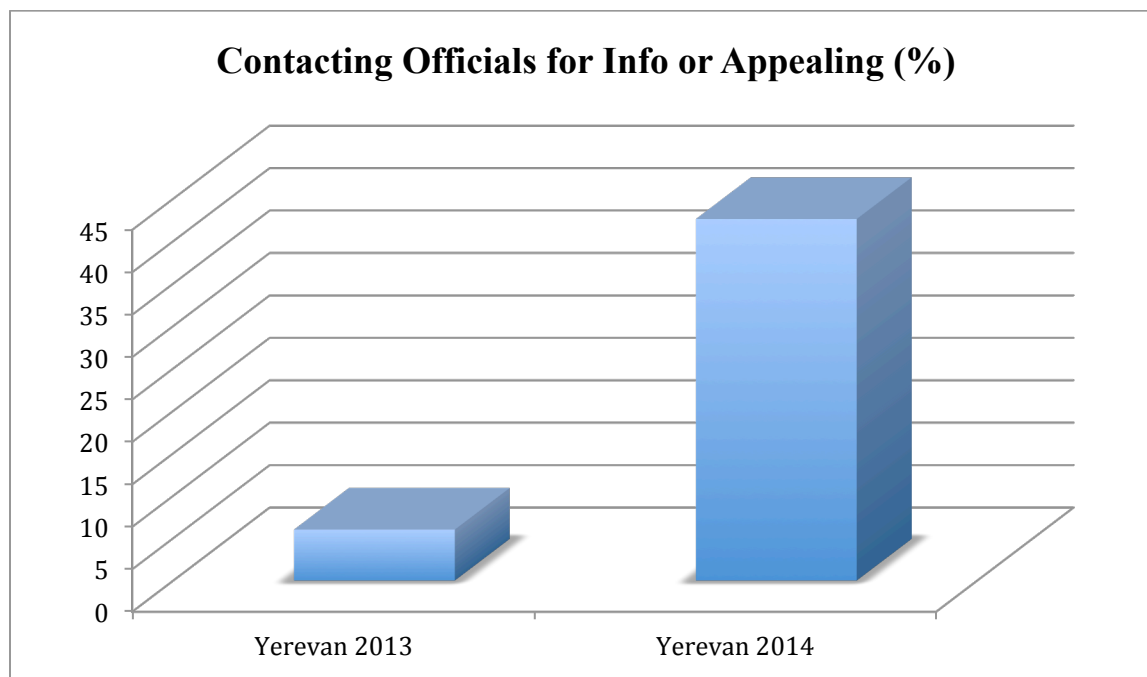


Participation in Online (including via SNS) Campaigns, Causes

The Survey 1 results reveal that in 2013, **36%** of the respondents provided a positive answer to the question whether they participated in online (including via social networking sites (SNS)), campaigns and causes. The mean of the times participated during the previous 2 months was 1.43, and during the previous year – 3.37. The maximum number of causes participated in during the previous 2 months was 10, and during the previous year - 15.

The data for separate cities indicated that in Yerevan, 36% of the respondents participated in online campaigns and causes. The average number of times participated was 1 for the previous 2 months, and 3.81 – for the previous year. The maximum number of cases of participation in online campaigns was 2 for the previous 2 months, and 8 – for the previous year.

In Gyumri, 42% of the respondents indicated participation in online campaigns and causes. The average number of times participated was 1.93 for the previous 2 months, and 3.6 - for the previous year. The maximum number of campaigns participated in was 10 for the previous 2 months, and 15 – for the previous year.

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In Vanadzor, 31% of the respondents took part in online campaigns or causes. The mean of the number of times participated was 1.46 for the previous 2 months, and 2.3 for the previous year. The maximum number of campaigns participated in was 5 – during the previous 2 months and 6 – during the previous year. (Figure 27 illustrates the results pertinent to online participation in campaigns/causes, obtained from Survey 1.)

*Figure 27: Participation in Online Campaigns and Causes, Including via SNS, Survey 1 Results by cities*
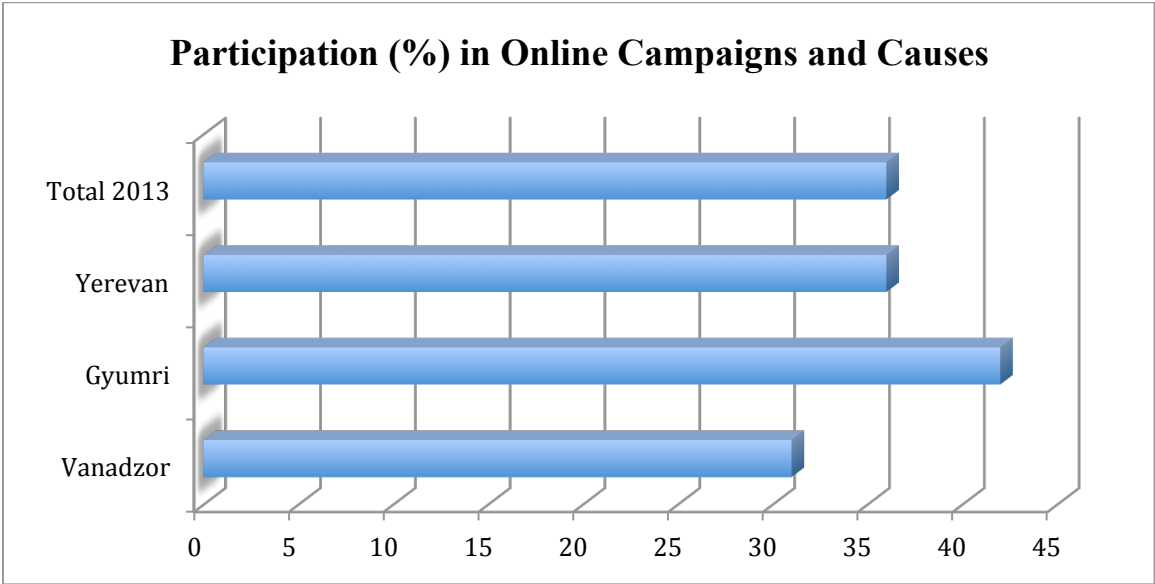


Survey 2 data indicate, that in 2014, in Yerevan, **19%** of respondents took part in online campaigns or causes. The average number of causes participated in was 1.5 during the previous 2 months, and 3 – during the previous year. (Figure 28 illustrates the results of Survey 1 and 2.)

*Figure 28: Participation in Online Campaigns and Causes, Including via SNS, Survey 1 and 2 Results*



**Participation (%) in Online Campaigns and Causes**
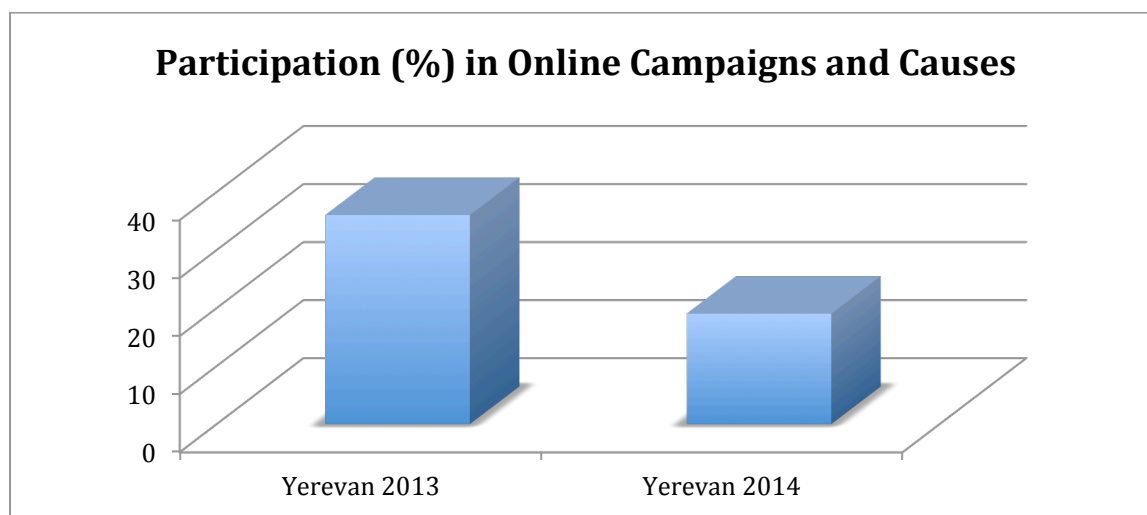
Comparison of the results for Yerevan in 2013 and 2014 shows a significant decline in participation in online campaigns and causes in 2014 – from 36% to 19%. While there is no readily available explanation for this phenomenon, it could be suggested that, as 2014 was rich in real-life (vs. online) campaigns and causes in Yerevan and in the regions, many young people switched from participation from online campaigns to real-life ones - physically attending and taking part in the campaigns and demonstrations against the issues of common concern (e.g. public transpiration fee increase, imposed unpopular pension reform, etc.), which is also testified by the increased rate of *physical* participation in demonstrations, as discussed above.

Initiating Campaigns and Causes Using Online Media, Including SNS

According to the Survey 1 results, in 2013, only **10.7%** of the total number of the respondents initiated campaigns and causes using online media, including via SNS, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. In other words, only 16 out of the 150 respondents answered positively to the question whether they initiated online campaigns and causes. The mean of the number of campaigns initiated during the previous 2 months is 0.52, and during the previous year - 1.07. The maximum number of online campaigns initiated during the previous 2 months is 3, and the maximum for the previous year is 4.

The data for 3 separate cities indicate that in Yerevan, in 2013, only 6% of the respondents provided a positive answer to the question about organizing online campaigns and causes, in

Gyumri - 14%, and in Vanadzor - 11.8%. The results for Gyumri are again the highest. (Figure 29 illustrates the results of Survey 1).

The Survey 2 results indicate, that in Yerevan, in 2014, **19.1%** of the respondents organized online campaigns and causes, including via SNS. The average number of online campaigns organized during the previous 2 months was 0.33, and 1.78 – during the previous year. (Figure 30 illustrates the comparison of the results obtained from Survey 1 and Survey 2.)

It is interesting to note that the share of the young people who *initiated* online campaigns and causes appears to be significantly higher in 2014, compared with the results of 2013 (10.7% vs. 19.1%). It is suggested that the reason behind this could be organization of carpool and car share initiatives during the campaign against increase in the transportation fee (2014). This proposition is also supported by the testimonies of the young people who noted during the focus group meetings that many of their friends who were students in Yerevan posted on their Facebook pages their route, time and point of departure, so that any friends who needed a lift could go with them and not use public transport – as a sign of protest.

*Figure 29: Initiating Online Campaigns and Causes, Including via SNS, Survey 1 Results*
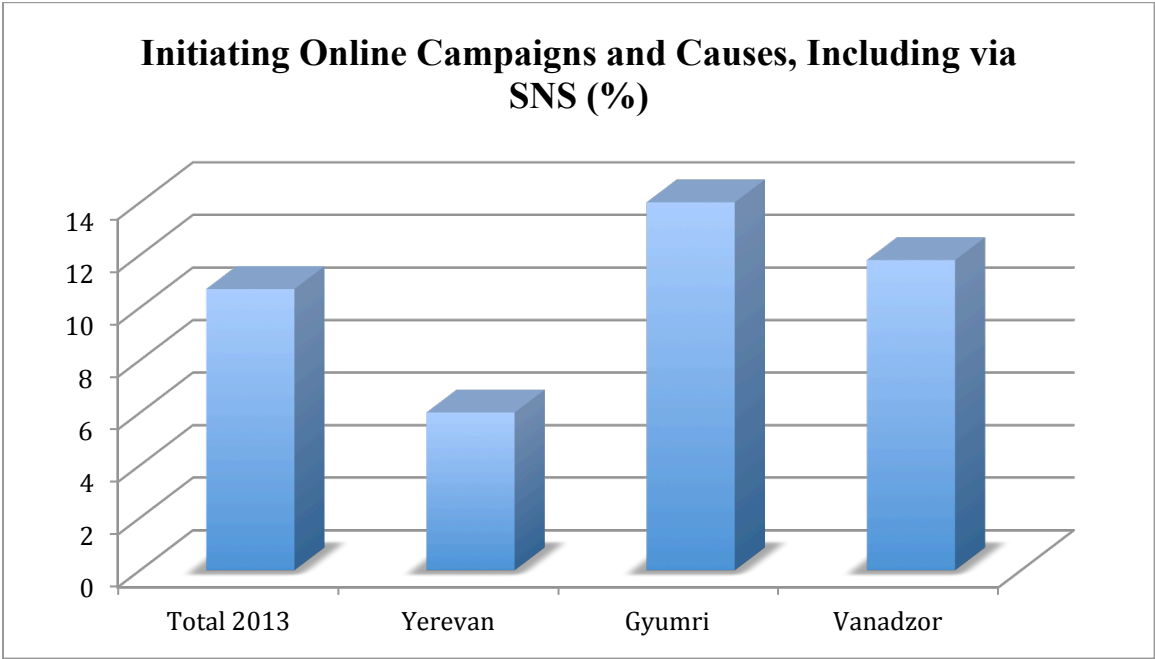
*Figure 30: Initiating Online Campaigns and Causes, Surveys 1 and 2 Results*
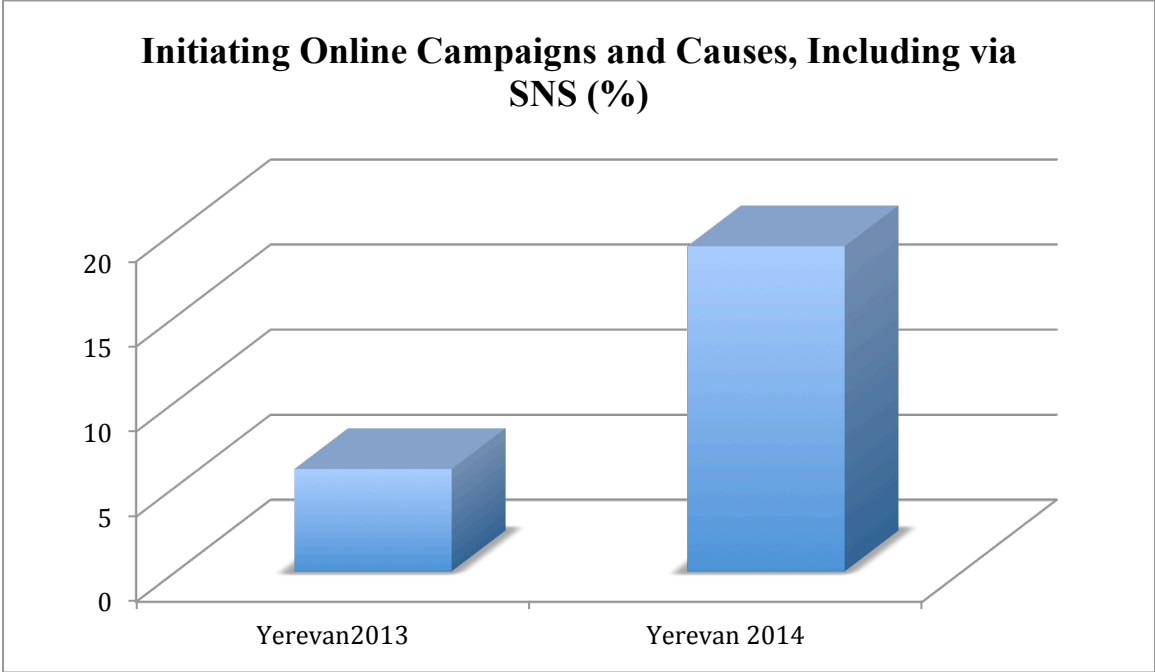


It is worth noting that in 2014, in Yerevan, the youth *participated* in less online campaigns and causes as compared to the year 2013, however, at the same time, *initiated* more online campaigns and causes than the year before. (These results are illustrated in the Figure 31 below.)

*Figure 31: Yerevan 2014 Survey Results for Involvement in Online Causes and Campaigns, and Initiating Online Causes and Campaigns*
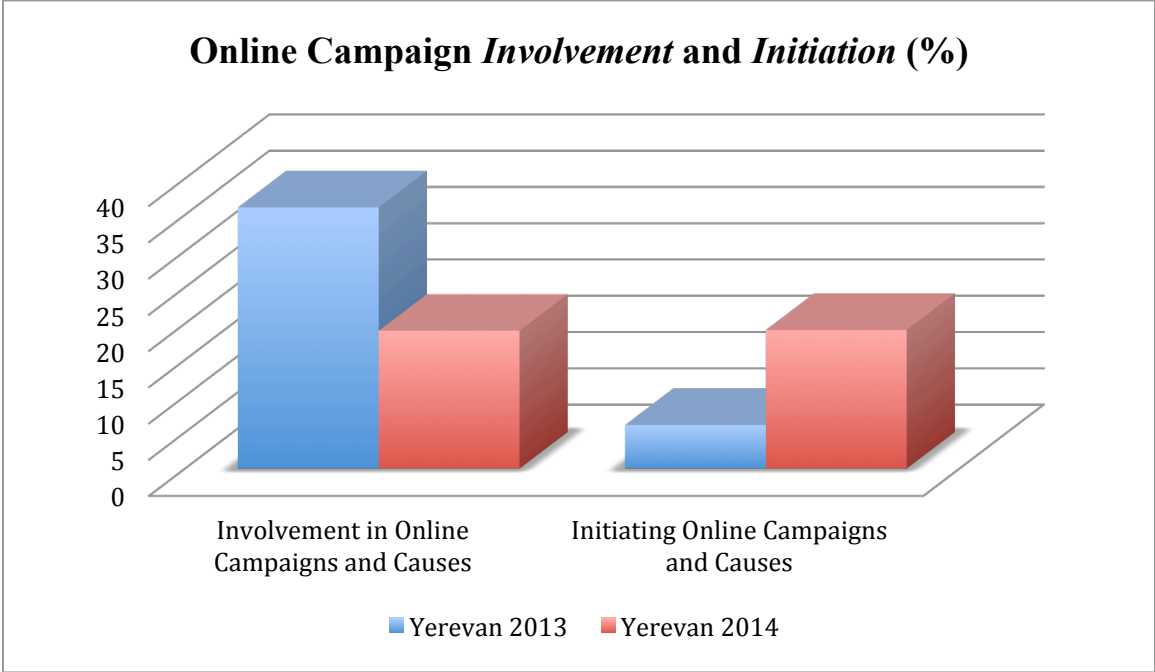
***Category 5: Donating to Causes, Charity***

The Survey 1 results reveal that in 2013, **46%** of the respondents donated money to causes and charities. The mean of the number of times donated during the previous year was 2.74, and the maximum number of times donated was 11. (Figure 32 illustrates Survey 1 results.)

The breakdown by cities is as follows: Yerevan – 32% of the respondents donated, in Gyumri - 66%, and in Vanadzor - 40% of the respondents donated to charities and causes.

The data from Survey 2 indicate that **53.2%** of the respondents donated money to charities and causes in 2014, which is a significant increase from the previous year's 32%. (Figure 33 illustrates the comparison of the results of Survey 1 and Survey 2.)

*Figure 32: Donating to Charities and Causes, Survey 1 Results*
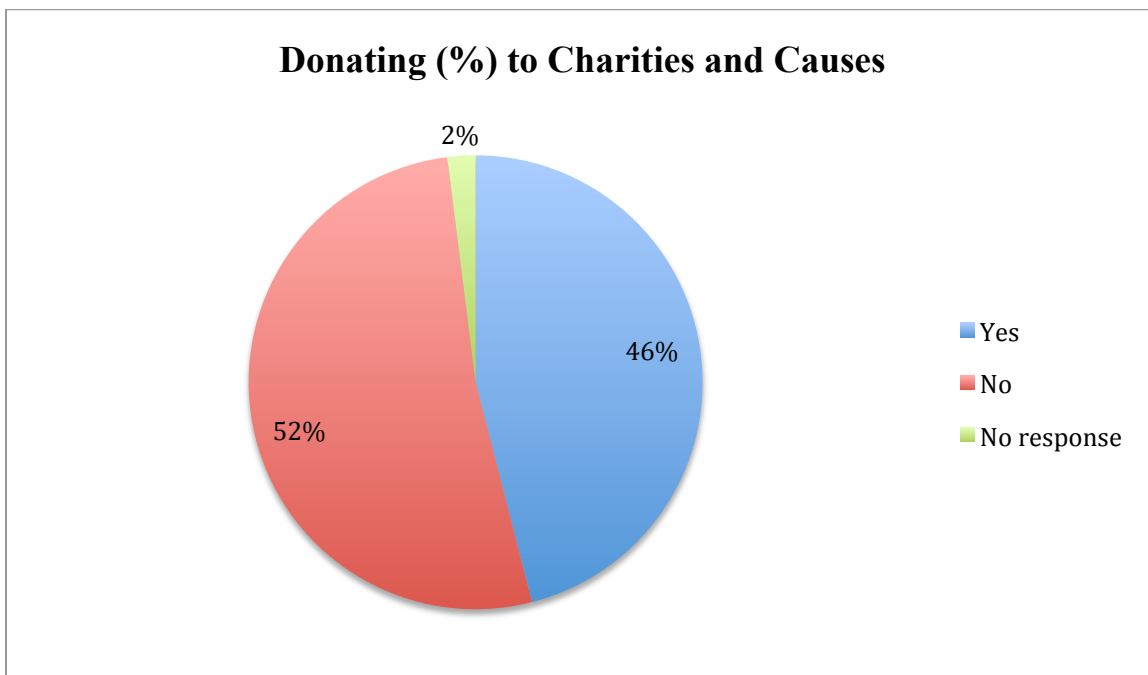
*Figure 33: Donating to Charities and Causes, Survey 1 and 2 Results*



**Donating (%) to Charities and Causes**
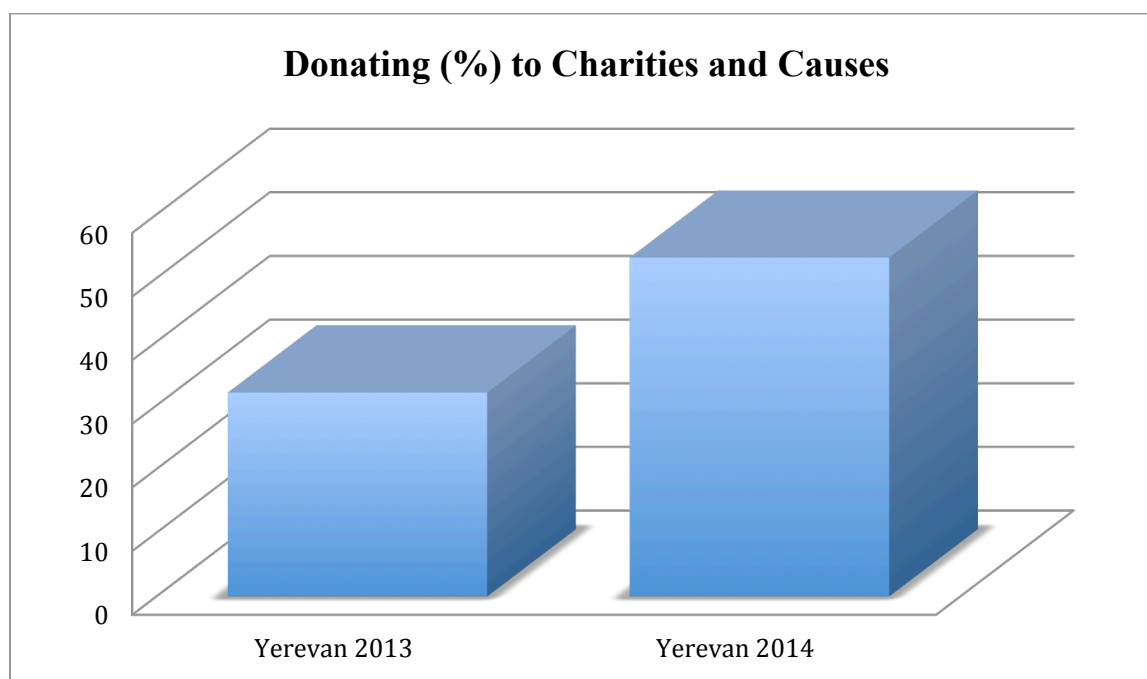
It appears that donating money to causes and charities is on rise amongst the youth in Armenia. As it has been mentioned before, this trend could be explained by the increasingly popular among the telecommunication companies option of SMS donations – mobile operators often send texts suggesting the customers to donate for various causes – from more general causes, such as, for instance, child protection or back to school support for socially vulnerable families, to more specific cases and campaigns that raise money for a certain goal. Mobile voting takes only a couple of minutes – the sum of money, which normally ranges from 100AMD – to 5000AMD (0.2 USD to around 10 USD) is requested to be keyed and sent to a specific number, and the amount will be paid by the mobile operator and later billed to the customer. The ease of the process with a minimum set of resources required (time, effort), and the fact that the requested donations are quite small are the factors that make this trend very attractive for many people.

## 6.4. Civic Participation Index

It is suggested that based on the results of the Survey 1 and 2, Civic Participation Index (CP Index) can be computed, to shed light on the trends in civic participation in the country.

An index allowing to see the changes in the civic participation rates and patterns over a certain period of time would be a useful tool for analysis and formulation of further policies and

directions, as well as more effective and better tailored interventions aimed at democracy promotion and development. While the sample for the calculation of Index is not very large, it can be still considered representative of the situation and trends happening in the country.

The CP Index represents a useful tool for data comparison purposes within and across countries.

Based on the difference between the Civic Participation scores for the city of Yerevan in 2013 and 2014, CP Index (total and for separate indicator categories) has been computed.

Using the formula for CP Index calculation, specified in the section 6.2. of this Chapter

$(Z = \frac{S2\ V*100}{S1\ V}$ – for calculation of total CP Index, and $Zcat = \frac{S2\ Vcat*100}{S1\ VCat}$ - for calculation of CP Index by separate indicator categories), CP Index for Yerevan for the year 2014 has been computed.

The result – Civic Participation Index (2014) - indicates **128.80%** increase in overall civic participation in the capital Yerevan, as compared with the previous year.

The total index and separate category indicator indices are presented in the Table 15.

*Table 15: Civic Participation Index: Total and per Indicator Category*

| N | CP Score | CP 2013 Yerevan | CP 2014 Yerevan | CP Index (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | 33.57 | 43.24 | **128.80** |
| 1 | Community Service/Volunteering | 4.29 | 4.31 | 100.46 |
| 2 | Participation in a Group/ Belonging to an Organization | 1.10 | 1.28 | 116.36 |
| 3 | Spreading/Sharing Information/News, including via ICT | 13.92 | 13.18 | 94.68 |
| 4 | Political and Civic Action, including Online Political and Civic Activism | 11.55 | 19.39 | 167.87 |
| 5 | Donating to Causes, Charity | 2.90 | 5.00 | 172.41 |

The results of comparison of the CP indices for separate indicator categories reveal that the indices for the categories of *Community Service/Volunteering* and *Participation in a*

*Group/Belonging to an Organization* remained almost unchanged, with a slight growth in the latter category (100.46 and 116.36 respectively), while the results for *Political and Civic Action* (including online) and *Donating to Charities and Causes* indicate significant growth (167.87% and 172.41% respectively) in 2014. The index for *Spreading/Sharing Information and News* category shows a slight decline (94.68%) in 2014.

The suggested tools for measuring civic participation (CP Score and CP Index) can be a useful addition to the arsenal of measures and resources used by both local and international organizations, as well as the government structures in Armenia and elsewhere for researching and better understanding the civic participation forms, patterns, manifestations, its level and magnitude in separate communities, regions or countries. The results obtained from such a study would be instrumental for information, comparison and policy formation purposes.

## 6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the development process and analysis of the results of the "Civic Health" Questionnaire, applied for the first time in a transitioning country context – to collect data on civic participation in Armenia." The questionnaire comprising the following five indicator categories with their respective sub-categories, was used for measuring civic participation: (1) Community service/volunteering, (2) Participation in a group/membership in an organizations, (3) Receiving and spreading (including via ICT) information and news, (4) Civic and political action (including online), and (5) Donating to charities or causes. The indicator categories and sub-categories have been operationalized to allow measuring the obtained results: relative weights have been assigned to each category of indicators and their sub-categories.

The value 100.00 (one hundred) has been chosen to denote the maximum Civic Participation Score (CP Score).

In 2013, the Survey was conducted among university students in the cities of Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor (50 students from each city). In 2014, the same Survey has been conducted among the students of Yerevan only.

Civic Participation Score (CP score) has been computed based on the average of the sum of each operationalized indicator weight received from each respondent.

'Civic Health' survey results received from each surveyed city in 2013 were (CP Score out of 100.00) the following:

- Yerevan – CP Score: 33.57
- Gyumri – CP Score: 41.26
- Vanadzor – CP Score: 38.81

The total CP Score for 2013 is 37.91 (out of 100.00).

The results of the Survey indicate that the Civic Participation score for Yerevan (33.57) is slightly lower than those for the cities of Gyumri and Vanadzor. However, comparison with the 2014 survey results (43.24 - CP Score for Yerevan 2014) shows a significant increase in civic participation over the period of one year.

To allow obtaining more detailed information and comparison across the indicator categories – with the view of identification of the gaps and development of more tailored solutions, the civic participation scores have also been computed for all the 5 above-specified separate indicator categories.

The 'Civic Health' survey results have been presented, discussed and compared across each of the 5 categories with their indicators by a total result for 2013 survey, separate results for each city (Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor) in 2013, and the results of the 2014 survey for Yerevan.

Comparing the results of 2013 Survey (or Survey 1), it can be concluded that Gyumri and Vanadzor youth were more active compared to youth in Yerevan in the categories of *Volunteering, Organizational membership, Receiving/accessing and sharing information online, Involvement in causes/campaigns, Participation in meetings where local issues are discussed, Initiating online campaigns and causes, and Donating to charities and causes*. (Please, refer to Table 10.)

Gyumri youth was found to be the most active in the categories of *Participation in demonstrations* (18%, compared to 7% - in Vanadzor, and 8%- in Yerevan), and *Donation to charities and causes* (62%).

Table 16 presents the summary of the results received during the Civic Health Surveys in Armenia.

*Table 16: Civic Health Survey Results Summary by Indicators*

| N | Indicator Category (Sub-category) | Gyumri (%) | Vanadzor (%) | Yerevan 2013 (%) | Yerevan 2014 (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Community Service/Volunteering | 64 | 66 | 56 | 55.3 |
| 2. | Belonging to an organization/group | 34 | 34 | 12.2 | 15 |
| 3. a) | Political and Civic Action, including online political and civic activism: a) Watching news on TV | 92 | 86 | 98 | 95.7 |
| 3.b | Listening to news on Radio | 16 | 12 | 54 | 48 |
| 3.c | Reading newspapers | 74 | 70 | 82 | 78.7 |
| 3.d | Accessing/reading/watching news on Internet | 94 | 98 | 94 | 91 |
| 3.e | Discussing news with family and friends | 94 | 86 | 92 | 95.7 |
| 3.f | Accessing and spreading information and news online | 74 | 78 | 68 | 76.6 |
| 4 a) | Political and Civic Action: a) Voting | 70 | 88 | 76 | 78 |
| 4.b | Involvement in causes and campaigns | 15.7 | 16 | 12 | 29.8 |
| 4.c | Participation in demonstrations | 18 | 7 | 8 | 42.6 |
| 4.d | Participation in meetings where local problems are discussed | 24 | 12 | 8 | 17 |
| 4.e | Contacting officials for information or appealing | 8 | 5.9 | 6 | 42.6 |
| 4.f | Participation in online campaigns and causes (including via SNS) | 42 | 31 | 36 | 19 |
| 4.g | Initiating online campaigns and causes | 14 | 11.8 | 6 | 19.1 |
| 5 | Donating to charities and causes | 66 | 40 | 32 | 53.2 |

Comparison of the 'Civic Health' Survey results for 2013 and 2014, however, reveals significant increase in civic participation in Yerevan during the year 2014. The results for nearly all the

categories have improved (increased), with particularly significant growth registered in the categories of *Involvement in causes and campaigns* (12% vs. 29.8%), *Participation in Demonstrations* (8% vs. 42.6%), *Contacting officials and appealing decisions* (6% vs. 42.6%) *Initiating online campaigns and causes* (6% vs. 19.1%) and *Donating to Charities and Causes* (32% vs. 53.2%). A downward trend has only been registered in the category of *Participation in online campaigns and causes* (36% vs. 19%).

With the view of allowing comparison and monitoring of civic participation and its trends across different localities and over different periods of time, the chapter has further introduced the Civic Participation Index (CP Index), which represents a useful tool for scholars and practitioners working in the areas of civic engagement/civil society building and democracy promotion. CP Index, computed based on the difference in the total CP scores received in 2013 and 2014 for the city of Yerevan, indicates 128.80% increase in civic participation in the year of 2014. Calculations of CP Index are also done for each indicator category, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of the trends in civic participation in Yerevan.

Use of CP Score and CP Index will be beneficial for analysis of the situation and the trends in civic participation in any locality, as those tools will allow cross-community and/or cross-country studies and comparisons, and as a result, formulation of more specific and better-tailored policy responses and strategies for filling the existing gaps and increasing the opportunities for more active and informed involvement of the population in public affairs and realization of their duties and responsibilities as of citizens of a democratic state.

# CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS

This research has evolved around the concept, types, forms, patterns, determinants and impact of civic participation on the democratization and development outcomes in the post-soviet context of Armenia, which after a quarter of a century of 'transitioning' both its political and economic sectors, is still found at the crossroads between democracy and authoritarianism, as well as between economic stability and stagnation.

An array of challenges facing the country and hindering further democratization and development efforts include lack of rule of law and lack of democratic governance practices in the public institutions, including local, regional and national governments, widespread corruption, patronage, informal monopoly in economic, political and other sectors.

The question passing between the lines of this dissertation is whether *civic participation* can become the factor that could eventually tilt the scales towards democracy and development, helping to address at least some of those pressing issues and make a move from the status of 'semi-consolidated authoritarianism" toward a more democratic regime, or it will be supressed again and lose its momentum, leaving Armenia at the crossroads and reversing the recently achieved certain progress and gained opportunities.

The terms *civic participation*, *civic engagement* and *civic activism* have been used interchangeably within this dissertation to denote a wide range of activities, performed by citizens, individually or collectively, with the aim of identifying and addressing various issues of common concern, affecting their and their communities' lives.

To theoretically frame and position the research, the dissertation provided a thorough review and analysis of the literature on democracy, civil society and development, with a specific focus on the characteristics and peculiarities of those concepts in transitioning country settings. Differences and specifics in democratization trajectories and outcomes in the new democracies have been discussed, with a special attention to the role and impact of civic participation, as well as the institutional and other contexts (historical, political, economic, etc.) that have been suggested to have important implications for civic activism in a given locality.

It has been argued that civic participation is a critical ingredient that can foster the processes of democracy promotion and local development through increasing citizen involvement in the

decision-making and policy formation, and improving transparency and accountability of the government, as well as it can contribute to achievement of more inclusive, effective and sustainable economic development outcomes in communities.

In a pursuit to examine and provide empirical evidence on the practice, determinants and impact of civic participation in the transitioning context of Armenia, especially given the continuing efforts of international organizations aimed at increasing civic engagement across the Armenian communities, as well as the recent spike in civic activism in the country, comprehensive primary research has been undertaken to collect relevant data and gain insights from the ground, to add to the limited body of literature on civic engagement, its practice and trends in post-soviet countries.

Study of civic participation in Armenia has been carried out at the community level – by researching civic participation practice, its forms, patterns, determinants and impact on the communities, as well as the national level – by means of analyzing the major civic initiatives and campaigns that took place in the country during the recent five years, and assessing their outcomes and impact.

The findings of the research indicate that civic participation practice, forms, patterns and impact vary greatly across the communities, depending on a wide array of determinants of both individual and contextual character.

Most common forms and types of registered civic activism, however, have been summarized under the following categories, represented in a hierarchical order, starting from the most basic and low-impact civic activities and moving to higher impact activities that have a stronger potential to influence the democratization and development outcomes in the communities:

- *Physical work/labour*: helping a neighbour or a friend to fix a problem in the community, e.g. repairing a road, fixing a bridge, renovating a school, help in haymaking, harvest gathering, community clean-up, tree planting, garbage collection, other improvements, etc.
- *Organization of cultural, sports and other events in the community*: competitions, concerts, celebrations of holidays, harvest festivals, etc.
- *Organization of or participation in awareness-raising campaigns and capacity building events*: organization of seminars, trainings, community action planning workshops, causes, etc.

- *Donation/organization and/or participation in fund-raising campaigns, rallies, drives***:** donation of money and goods/food, clothes for orphanage children, fund-raising to help the socially vulnerable families in the community, donations for repair of school, kindergarten, house of culture or other building of community importance, etc.

- *Participation in decision*-**making,** *collaboration with public, non-profit and/or private sector organizations in solution of community problems and improvement of community's economic prospects:* participation in Community Council meetings, discussion of community's priorities and issues, budget and other plans with the Mayor at regularly organized community meetings, making suggestions on community development plan and voicing views and opinions about matters of community importance, identifying and addressing community issues and problems, including establishing new collaborations for increasing community's economic prospects, such as by establishing new SMEs, PPPs, etc.

Depending on the type of civic activities prevalent in a given community, the impact of civic participation on the democratization and development outcomes of the communities differed, ranging from low or superficial, to high or significant.

The research findings have also indicated that younger people - high school and college/university students (aged group 16-22) and young professionals (age group 23-35), represent the most civically active group in Armenia.

As regards the obstacles for civic participation, lack of resources  - time and money, distrust/unwillingness to cooperate with others, sense of disillusionment and disempowerment, lack of belief that citizen participation would matter or change anything, as well as health issues, preventing participation, have been among the most frequently indicated ones.

The most frequently mentioned incentives for civic participation in Armenia included philanthropy/desire to help the community, neighbors and friends, self-fulfillment and increased self-esteem, self-advancement and gain of more experience, knowledge, skills, connections, and improvement of one's career and job opportunities, feeling of belonging to a group/community, and way of spending time (pastime or hobby).

The study has also involved an in-depth analysis of civic participation determinants in Armenia. Among individual level determinants, it has been revealed that age, gender, resources, including time, money, education, social capital, access to ICT and ICT skills, as well as personal traits (e.g. extrovert vs. introvert, etc.) have a strong influence on civic participation. At the contextual level, the quality of the local institutions (local government), agency capacity of the Mayor and other community leaders (education, skills, personal traits, attitudes, etc.), the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs), stocks and types of social capital available in the community, civic education level and civic capacity of the community, availability of international assistance projects (capacity building), as well as accessibility of ICT were found to be among the most influential determinants of civic participation.

Primary research in social capital, undertaken within the framework of this work, has revealed its availability in the Armenian communities, especially that of the bonding social capital (strong ties - connections within similar groups: families, friends, relatives, etc.), and confirmed a strong relationship between availability of linking/bridging social capital (weak ties – connections to 'others', other groups and organizations) with civic participation. Furthermore, based on evidence from communities, it has been suggested that the link of causality between the linking/bridging social capital and civic participation goes in both ways, as it has been found that they mutually reinforce each other, as a result, generating more of each.

It has been argued that civic or democratic citizenship education is another critical determinant of civic participation in Armenia. An inquiry into the current practice and quality of education in the country has indicated that, while certain progress has been made in that direction over the recent decade, there are still gaps and issues to be addressed in order to ensure adequate civic education level for all the citizens of the country. Among possible measures in this area, it has been suggested to improve the training of civic education teachers, to start basic civic education classes at elementary or early middle school level, as well as make improvements in the current curriculum of civic education classes taught in the 9th grade of general (middle) schools by introducing more student-friendly and real-life related material and exercises/tasks, using more interactive methods of teaching, including organizing study tours and visits to various institutions and organizations, and introducing civic education also at the college/university level. As an important measure that would inevitably have an impact on further democratization of public institutions in the country, it has been proposed to organize mandatory civic education seminars

and/or training courses for all high-level officials, and regularly organize civic education training courses for all the citizens wishing to improve their knowledge of democratic citizenship.

The primary research has also covered the growing in its popularity use of ICT in Armenia, and assessed the potential of ICT to become an additional platform for civic participation. The findings of the research indicate, that besides being an important determinant of civic participation, ICT represents an important and less resource-demanding medium of civic engagement in the country. The ICT use habits survey results reveal that in 2013, 72% of the surveyed youth have been using Internet for the purposes of e-mail, social networking and accessing online media for news on local and global events. Considerable portion of the respondents have also indicated using ICT for participating or initiating online causes, campaigns, signing petitions, or contacting public and non-governmental organizations for information, requests, solutions of issues and collaboration offers. Given the certain registered progress and the ongoing efforts of expanding the e-governance opportunities in the country, ICT has been indeed found to serve as an important platform for civic participation in Armenia.

Role of ICT has been instrumental in the organization of most of the major civic initiatives in Armenia that took place in the course of the recent five years. It has been found that particularly Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites have been widely used for organization, information sharing and coordination of activities and strategies during those civic campaigns. Internet has been especially widely used during "I'm not Paying 150 drams", 'Dem em!", and "Electric Yerevan" ("No to Plunder") initiatives. In addition to serving as a medium for information exchange and activity coordination, it has been discussed that ICT have also played the role of a safeguard and a self-protection 'weapon' against any violation or impunity of police and officials executing the commands of the government during the protests, as the participants of demonstrations used to record most of their interactions with the stand-off police and officials and share them on social media to immediately inform their supporters and fellow-citizens about any new developments, as well as any violations of citizens' rights. Another testimony of the growing penetration and popularity of ICT across the country has been the immediately going viral footage from demonstrations, especially anything containing controversial content, flooding not only the social networking sites, but also the local online media.

During the review and analysis of the major civic initiatives/campaigns that took place during 2010-2015, it has been established that while most of them addressed a rather narrow and specific issue and, subsequently, had a localized impact in case of positive resolution, they have all played an important role in increasing public awareness regarding the addressed issues, and as a result, had a certain impact and implications on the underlying causes of those civic initiatives, such as lack of citizen involvement in decision-making, lack of rule of law, lack of accountability and transparency of the government, widespread corruption, patronage, etc.

The evidence obtained from the empirical research confirms that the recent 'civic awakening' in Armenia can be mostly credited to the younger post-soviet generation, who appear to be more active, more educated and knowledgeable about laws, as well as their rights and responsibilities. These young 'self-determined' citizens, as they define themselves, have proven to be able to stand and fight for their rights, and they are not easily intimidated or threatened by the regime's usual 'methods'.

Another original contribution of this research has been the development and testing of an important for a transitioning context tool for measuring "Civic Health" and civic participation trends. Calculated as a result of the surveys carried out during this research, Civic Participation Scores for Armenia (total for 2013 CP Score: 37.91 out of 100.00) and for the capital city of Yerevan (CP Score: 33.57 out of 100.00 in 2013) allow analysis and inferences regarding the practice, magnitude and patterns of civic participation. The Civic Participation Index (CP Index) reflecting the change in the CP Score from 2013 to 2014, allows tracking and monitoring the changes in the overall civic health and civic participation trends, as well as separately by each indicator category, thereby providing an opportunity for more detailed exploration and more targeted and tailored responses to the identified needs or gaps.

Based on the proposed tool for measuring civic participation and assessing its trends, a 128.80% increase (CP Index) has been registered in Yerevan in 2014, as compared to 2013. Hence, it has been empirically established that civic health in Armenia is improving - an upward trend has been registered across nearly all the civic participation indicators, including significant increase in youth's involvement in causes and campaigns, participation in demonstrations, contacting officials for information or appealing, initiating online campaigns and donating to charities and causes.

In the light of this positive finding, it is worth reinstating some of the opportunities for further improvement and increase of civic participation practice and its impact in the country: it is suggested that continuing efforts and well-formulated strategies aimed at improvement of e-government and ICT diffusion, improvement of the institutional context, establishment of productive collaborations between the public sector, civil society and private sector organizations with the aim of solution of community issues, fostering participatory democracy through creation of an enabling environment and formal institutions for citizen participation in decision-making and development efforts, increasing social capital in the communities, improving civic education level and skills of the population, increasing ICT access and its possibilities to serve as an additional medium for civic engagement, continuing fight against corruption and strengthening the rule of law in the country will have a strong effect on civic participation and will contribute to the increase of its level and magnitude, resulting also in significant progress toward achievement of democratization and development goals.

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*Annex 1. Guiding Questions and Key Points for Community Profile Mapping, Observation, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Meetings and Social Capital Study*

*Development of Community Profiles, Key Informants Interviews and Observation:*

- General data on the community: demographic data, public institutions, community institutions (kindergarten, schools, house of culture, community centre, etc.)
- CSOs (registered (NGOs, unions, associations, etc.) and non-registered community based groups/organizations (CBOs));
- Private sector: functioning SMEs, cooperatives, etc., (if any).
- Availability of internet in the community, and rough estimate of the share of the population using internet
- Cooperation and involvement of citizens in the community affairs, problem solution, etc.
- Availability of information boards in the community (if yes, where, how many, how often the information is updated)
- Citizens' awareness of and access to the Community development plan. When was it last time discussed in an open community meeting?
- Citizens' awareness of and access to the information regarding the Community budget. When was the budget publicly discussed last time? Is it available on the information board? How does the municipality ensure/promote its openness and transparency?
- Participation of the citizens in the Community Council meetings and discussion and solution of community issues (How often are Community Council meetings organized? How many citizens regularly attend and take part in the discussion, raise their concerns, voice suggestions, make proposals regarding the community priorities?
- How important is cooperation with the community for the Municipality and what is being done to promote the cooperation?
- Number (and some examples) of projects implemented by the municipality or other state actors and the community during the previous two years.
- How can the community be characterized according to the level of their civic participation? (Very passive, passive, Indifferent, Somewhat active, Active, Very Active). Who are the community members who participate? Who is excluded (unable to participate)?
- Are there civic education classes at the community school? Availability of qualified teachers;
- Interest of the Municipality in promoting civic participation and involvement of the citizens in identification and solution of community problems; any initiatives in that direction.

- Accessibility of the Municipality to the community – visitors, applicants, the attitude of the officials to them, availability information regarding 'open door' days and reception hours.
- Willingness of the officials to talk, their attitude and their stance regarding the importance of the citizen participation in the community affairs, their attitudes to the CSOs functioning in the community (if any).

*Focus Group Meetings in Communities*

Main issues:

- Forms and patterns of civic participation in the community; perception of what civic engagement is and what forms it takes in the community;
- Cooperation and involvement of citizens in the community affairs, problem solution, etc.
- Citizens' participation in decision-making regarding the issues affecting the community's life: how does the community raise issues/problems/priorities and discuss them with the local government? Which percentage of the suggestions is being included in the community development plan? Does the citizen involvement have any impact on the development plan and the allocations from the community budget?
- Cooperation of the citizens with the local government –initiatives/projects implemented in collaboration, and the forms and patterns of citizen involvement in those activities;
- Who are the community members who participate? What is their motivation? Who does not participate, why?
- Is the institutional environment conductive to citizen participation? If yes, what opportunities are available? If no, what are the main obstacles for citizen participation?
- Is anything being done by the local municipality to promote civic participation?
- Have there been any economic activity contributing to the community's development as a result of the citizens' cooperation with the state or non-state actors? If yes, what?
- What was the impact of the citizen participation on the public institutions and their workings in the community? (transparency, accountability, responsiveness, openness to the public and suggestions, etc.)
- CSOs functioning in the community: registered and non-registered; their missions, members, organization, exogenously or locally created and funded, their activities, accomplishments (if any), the impact of their activities on the local community's development and democratization; obstacles they encounter, challenges, opportunities.
- What is the situation with civic education in the community? The classes, availability of teachers, willingness of the students to get involved in the community affairs, etc.
- What is the situation with internet access in the community? If internet is accessible – who are the users and what is internet being used for? (obtaining information from alternative sources of media, accessing laws and legislation, contacting state institutions, participating in development projects, campaigns, causes, etc.)

*Social Capital Study Guide*

Community profile: relevant information obtained from interviews and focus group meetings;

Blocks of questions regarding the following issues:

1) Definition of community and identification of community assets
   - Schools, services (health, transport, waste management, etc.), roads/streets, lights, recreational areas, markets, shops, businesses, etc.

2) Collective action and solidarity
   - Community cooperation for solution of a common problem- coming together to fix a problem and improve the quality of life in the community; examples of accomplished actions, responses from the government, obstacles and constraints on collective action

3) Community governance and decision-making
   - Information on the community leaders, how they became leaders, the decision-making process in the community, involvement of the community in the decision-making

4) List of community institutions
   - Groups, associations and organizations that function in the community, their role in improvement the well-being in the community, how they were created (government, community or other NGO led), the leadership and how it gets elected, how decisions are made in those organizations

5) Relationships between the community and the organizations
   - Importance of each organization in the community

6) Institutional network and organizational density
   - Relationships between the organizations, the community leaders and the community: which organizations work together, which organizations work against each other, membership in those organizations, resources of those organization and whether they share them.

*Annex 2. Research on Civic Education in Armenia*

A small- scale primary research has been carried out in Armenian Schools – 2 schools in the case study communities (rural) and 2 randomly selected schools in the city of Vanadzor, with the view of involving also urban schools in the sample.

The main purpose has been the assessment of the quality of Civic Education in Armenia, in terms of their adequacy for preparing knowledgeable and responsible citizens for a democracy. The primary research objectives were assessment of the textbook, identification of teachers' and students' views regarding civic education lessons, the textbook, training of teachers (TOT) needs, the gaps and opportunities for improving the quality of civic education nationwide.

The primary research comprised:

- Review of the $9^{th}$ grade textbook "Social Science", in particular the part on Civic Education, to assess the content of the latter in terms of adequacy for preparing knowledgeable citizens for their active role in a democracy;
- Civic Education lesson observation (in 2 Vanadzor schools and 2 schools in the selected case study communities): assessment of the quality of the classes- theoretical and practical material, availability of community related discussions, tasks, students' interest in the classes, the level of their engagement, use of extra-curricular material, visual aids, etc., connectedness with real life and community issues, the barriers and opportunities for making the classed effective.
- Semi-structured interviews with civic education teachers (in case study communities) to find out their views on the textbook, its content adequacy, their training needs, teaching methods and organization of the lessons;
- Informal Interviews with the $9^{th}$ grade students, taking Social Science classes at public schools (2 Vanadzor schools and 2 case study community school students), to find out their views regarding the classes, the textbook, the applicability of the content, teaching methods, gaps, if any, etc.

## Textbook Review

*Main Issues:*

- The content of the textbook, the adequacy of the content for the middle school students, language, style, presentation of the topics, etc.
- Tasks and assignments in the textbook: their connectedness with the topics discussed and their usefulness in ensuring consolidation of the received knowledge.

## Civic Education (Social Science) Lesson Observation

*Main issues:*

- Teaching materials: is the lesson based mainly on the textbook, or the teacher uses additional material, such as newspapers, other books, case studies, etc.
- Teaching methods: Is the lesson proceeding in a traditional- lecture based manner, or it is more interactive, involving discussions, question- answer session, role-plays, simulations, group works, mock political or judicial activities, etc.
- Are the student's engaged and motivated?  Do they actively participate in the lesson?
- Are any video or audio visual aids used during the class?
- Is there any visitor/guest from the community or a representative of a public institution – local or regional government, etc.
- Does teacher answer all the students' questions and how eager s/he is to explain and clarify the students' queries?
- How engagingly is the new material presented and explained?

## Semi-structured Interviews with Civic Education Teachers

*Questions:*

- What do you thing about the quality of the book? Is it adequate for equipping the students with knowledge about civics and motivating them to be an active citizen?
- How to you evaluate your training? Have you taken part in any seminars or trainings before? Do you feel you need to take part in more training and exchange opportunities?
- What methods of teaching to you use for making the subject more accessible and interesting for the students?

- Do you use any interactive teaching methods, teamwork, group discussions, tasks, simulation, role-play, mock political or judicial activities or other participatory methods?
- Do you use any video/audio material for the classes?
- Do you use computers and Internet for the classes?
- Are the parents, the school administration and the community involved in the teaching process?

### *Informal Interviews with 9th grade Students of Public Schools in Armenia*
*Questions:*

- Opinion about the textbook: Do you think the textbook is adequate for equipping you with knowledge on democratic citizenship, human rights and responsibilities?
- Do you like the way the material is presented and explained to you? Does your teacher use any interactive methods of teaching, such as role-play, teamwork, group discussions, mock elections, etc.?
- Does your teacher use any newspapers, other books, video/audio material, visual aids and/or Internet during teaching?
- Do you discuss real-life case studies pertaining to the textbook material studied? Are you encouraged to relate the studies material with real –life events, cases and your neighbourhood and/or community?
- Does your teacher answer all your questions and provide clarification during or after the lessons? Does s/he inspire and motivate you to learn the subject?

*Annex 3. Questionnaire on Internet Use Habits and Patterns*

*This questionnaire is a part of a broader research on Civic Participation in Armenia, being conducted by a PhD candidate at the University of Trento, Italy. The questionnaires are anonymous and your honest responses are highly appreciated. Thank you very much for your time!*

1) How often do you use internet?
   □ Every day    □ A few times a week □ Every week □ Less than a few times a month

   1.1. What do you mainly use internet for? (check as many responses as applicable)

   □ Email (personal and/or work)                      □ Access to information&
news
   □ Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc)   □ Other (please
specify)_____
   1.2. Which is the most frequently visited by you website?
   _____

2) Do you access and make use of online media (newspapers, radio, TV stations, etc) ?
   □ Yes                        □ No
   2.1 If Yes, What is your most favorite and most regularly visited online media website?
   _____

3) Do you write comments in news, blogs, and/or forums or otherwise engage in online communication and information exchange with any online media or their readership/audience?
   □ Yes                        □ No
   3.1 If yes, please, specify the media (and/or website(s))

   _____

4) Do you consult/access information on any public agency (e.g. government, national assembly, ministries, municipalities, employment agency, state insurance service, etc) website?
   □ Yes                        □ No

5) Have you ever engaged in online communication with any public agency?
   □ Yes                        □ No
   5.1. If yes, please specify the purposes:
   □ Requested information/clarification          □ Filed a complaint
   □ Requested support                        □ Other (please
   specify)_____

6) Do you consult/access information on any non-governmental organization's (e.g. NGO, charity, benevolent organizations, foundation, union, etc.) website?
   □ Yes                        □ No

7) Have you engaged in online communication with any non-governmental (e.g. NGO, charity, benevolent organization, foundation, union, etc.) organizations?
□ Yes                                □ No
7.1. If yes, please specify the purposes:

□ Requested information/clarification                    □ Offered collaboration
□ Requested support                                □ Other (please specify)_____

8) Do you join/participate in online causes, petitions, campaigns and other civic initiatives?
□ Yes                                □ No
8.1. If Yes, please specify:
□ Sign and share/forward online petitions    □ Participate in campaigns initiated online
□ Donate money for causes                □ Other (please specify)_____

9) Have you ever started/initiated an online cause/campaign?
□ Yes                                □ No
9.1 If Yes, how successful it was?
□ achieved its aim            □ made some impact            □ didn't achieve its aim

*Annex 4. Civic Health Questionnaire*

*This questionnaire is a part of a broader research on Civic Participation in Armenia, being conducted by a PhD candidate at the University of Trento, Italy. The questionnaires are anonymous and your honest responses are highly appreciated. Thank you very much for your time and                                                                                                                                    cooperation!*

_____

### 1)        Community service/volunteering

1.1.     Do you ever volunteer, formally (through an organization) or informally (helping a neighbour, fixing a common problem in the community, etc.)?
          □ Yes                                        □ No
If No, continue from section 2
1.1.1 If Yes, how often?

      □ Frequently        □ Sometimes          □ Seldom

1.1.2. How many times did you participate in a volunteering action during the last 2 month? _____

1.1.3. How many times did you participate in a volunteering action during the last year? _____

1.1.4. How many times did you become an initiator of a volunteer action in the community during the last 2 months?     __
1.1.5. How many times did you become an initiator of a volunteer action in the community during the last year?      _____

### 2) Participation in a group/belonging to an organization:

2.1. Do you belong to any organization/Are you a member of any organization? (Non-governmental organization, Grassroots/active groups, unions, associations, etc)
          □ Yes                              □ No
2.1.1. If yes, please, indicate the type of the organization  _____
2.1.2. How long have you been a member at that organization?     _____ years

### 3)  Receiving and spreading information  (including via ICT) on current events and news:

3.1.     Do you watch news on TV?
    □ Yes                                        □ No
3.1.1 If yes, how often ?
    □ Regularly/ Every day          □ Often            □ Sometimes          □ Seldom
3.2.Do you listen to news on radio?
    □ Yes                                        □ No
3.2.1. If yes, how often ?
    □ Regularly/ Every day          □ Often            □ Sometimes          □ Seldom
3.3. Do you read newspapers?
    □ Yes                                        □ No
3.3.1. If yes, how often ?

□ Regularly/ Every day       □ Often       □ Sometimes       □ Seldom

3.4. Do you access and read news online?

□ Yes                 □ No

3.4.1. If yes, how often ?

□ Regularly/ Every day       □ Often       □ Sometimes       □ Seldom

3.5. Do you discuss the news with family, friends, neighbours?

□ Yes                 □ No

3.5.1. If yes, how often ?

□ Regularly/ Every day       □ Often       □ Sometimes       □ Seldom

3.6. Do you spread/share news on current public events and affairs via social networking (e.g. facebook, twitter, etc.) and other sites (forums, blogs, etc.)?

□ Yes                 □ No

3.6.1. If yes, how often ?

□ Regularly/Every day       □ Often       □ Sometimes       □ Seldom

(Please, continue overleaf)

### 4) *Political and civic action, including online political and civic activism*:

4.1. Do you vote during elections?

□ Yes                 □ No

4.1.1 If Yes, when was the last time (year) you voted at public elections?
_____

4.2. Do you get involved in campaigns, causes, movements?

□ Yes                 □ No

4.2.1. If Yes, how many times did you get involved in any cause/campaign/movement during the last 2 months? _____

4.2.2.How many times did you get involved in any cause/campaign/movement during the past year? ___

4.3. Do you get involved in demonstrations?

□ Yes                 □ No

4.3.1. If Yes, how many times did you get involved in a demonstration during the past year? _____

4.4.Do you participate in meetings where local problems are discussed?

□ Yes                 □ No

4.4.1. If Yes, how many times did you participate in such a meeting during the last 2 months? _____

4.4.2. How many times did you participate in such a meeting during the past year? _____

4.5.Do you write formal letters to officials requesting written information regarding their work/responsibilities and/or your rights, or appealing or raising a community issue?

□ Yes                 □ No

4.5.1. If Yes, how many times did you write a letter to an official and/or appealed during the last 2 months? _____

4.5.2 How many times did you write a letter or appeal during the past year? _____

4.6. Do you use online media, including social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc) to participate in causes and campaigns?

□ Yes                                        □ No

4.6.1. If Yes, how often?

   □ Frequently        □ Sometimes        □ Seldom

   4.6.2.  How many times did you participate in an online cause/campaign during the last two months?
   4.6.3.  How many times did you participate in an online cause/campaign during the past year?


4.7.   Do you use online media, including social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc) to start/initiate causes and campaigns?

□ Yes                                        □ No

   4.7.1. If yes, how often?

□ Frequently        □ Sometimes        □ Seldom

   4.7.2.  How many times did you start/initiate an online cause/campaign during the last 2 months? ____
   4.7.3.  How many times did you start/initiate an online cause/campaign during the past year? _____

### 5)  *Making donations to voluntary organizations or donating to causes*

5.1. Do you make donations to voluntary or charity organizations, causes/campaigns?

□ Yes                                        □ No

If Yes,

5.1.2 How many times did you make a donation during the past year? _____