Faculty of Arts and Sciences
International School of Caucasian Studies

The Impact of Urban Protest in Post-Socialist Tbilisi: Beyond the Binary of Success/Failure

CEERES Master's Thesis

Iris Vijverberg
ISU: 65588 / UG: 2707571V

Supervisors:
Ketevan Gurchiani, Professor of Anthropology, Ilia State University
Catherine Helen Gibson, Lecturer in East European and Eurasian Studies, University of Tartu

August, 2023
Tbilisi, Georgia

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of:

Master of Caucasus Studies in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies: Ilia State University, Georgia

International Master's (IntM) in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies: University of Glasgow, UK

Master of Arts in Social Sciences (MA) in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies: University of Tartu, Estonia

Word count of the thesis: 21,258

Authorship Declaration: I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

Iris Vijverberg, 28. August 2023

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public

I, Iris Vijverberg, 09.04.1998, herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to the work created by me 'The Impact of Urban Protest in Post-Socialist Tbilisi: Beyond the Binary of Success/Failure', supervisors Ketevan Gurchiani and Catherine Helen Gibson,

- reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright;
- to make the work specified in p. 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright;
- I am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in p. 1;
- I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons' intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

Abstract

This study aims to understand the varying impact of urban social movements in post-socialist Tbilisi. Two urban social movements were selected for this research, (1) 'Defend Vake Park and (2) 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', which earlier studies have respectively labelled as cases of success and failure. This thesis, however, seeks to go beyond the binary distinction of success/failure and, instead, asks what ideals, discourse and practices have survived and flourished after the decline of the urban social movement. Hence, it bridges cultural studies and the study of (urban) social movements, perceiving impact as the meaning-making processes that are shaped by the movements' participants. Through ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants of the two selected movements, this study shows how multifaceted urban protests are in Georgia's capital, and how strengths and weaknesses of urban social movements transcends the analysis of whether the stated goals were achieved. It provides a richer and more nuanced perspective on the outcomes of urban social movements in a context conditioned by a post-socialist legacy.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the Scene: Dynamics of Urban Protest in Tbilisi

In the context of post-socialist transition, the relationship between social change and urban space is recognised as one of the most critical challenges. The urban space of Georgia, among that of other former socialist countries, has been heavily impacted by a rapid transformation to a market economy and neoliberal reforms. Such changes have led to radical urban reconstruction, which left its footprints in both public and semi-private spaces. In its post-independence years, the South Caucasian state was faced with a neglect of urban planning, followed by authoritarian, top-down decision-making in the urban sphere after the 2003 Rose Revolution (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 90-92). Against this background, the 'Right to the City' was claimed by different actors in post-Soviet Tbilisi, 'from spontaneous activism to social movements' (Berikishvili and Sichinava 2018: p. 1).

Even though urban activism in Tbilisi rose in a context of socio-political developments following Georgia's independence, the country has a rich tradition when it comes to protest movements. These demonstrations particularly evolved in the late 1980s, and were initially nationalistic in character, when the weakening Soviet Union allowed for such protests to take place. During this period, one of the most important protests was one in 1978, aimed at defending the official status of Georgian language (ibid). Furthermore, Georgians also mobilised themselves in order to fight urban-related problems. For example, heritage activists expressed their discontent about drillings at the Davit Gareja military training area by the Soviet military, and environmental activists protested against the construction of the Transcaucasian Railway. These examples utilise how questions related to heritage and the environment have been notably political in Georgia for many decades (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 93).

To understand the growth of urban activism in Tbilisi after Georgia's independence, it is important to consider two aspects of political-economic transformation. Firstly, post-independent Georgia dealt with severe economic collapse in the early 1990s,

which brought about conditions of social insecurity and impoverishment among a critical part of society. For example, the country's GDP fell to less than 25 percent in 1994 (Salukvadze and Golubchikov 2016). Simultaneously, two violent ethnopolitical conflicts took place in breakaway states Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as a civil war in Tbilisi. During this period, the political arena was dominated by a contestation of power (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 90). Secondly, urban activism developed in Tbilisi due to large-scale, aggressive neoliberal urban transformations that took place since the 2003 Rose Revolution. While the United National Movement (UNM) strengthened state capacity and took control in shaping urban development, the pressing need for transparent, socially and environmentally sensitive urban planning was ignored. Under Saakashvili, urban space was actively privatised, while the state promoted large-scale construction and development of projects (ibid: 92).

Taking the aforementioned factors into account, urban dwellers started to systematically organise themselves to defend Tbilisi's urban space. Here, the most important topics were the preservation of culture, identity, environment, and heritage of the city (ibid: 92-93). Between 2007 and 2010 different rallies were organised, including one aiming to save a historical building on Leonidze Street from being destroyed, as well as the Institute of Marxism and Leninism building on Rustaveli street. The main actor of the protests was *Tiflis Hamkari*, an NGO that was founded in 2005 with the aim of preserving the cultural heritage of Tbilisi. Even though these protests did not manage to reach their objectives, partly due to a limited number of participants, a new trend in protests started to emerge in Tbilisi. Beyond issues related to heritage, protesters also addressed environmental concerns during this period. For example, activists started the 'Save Mziuri' initiative on Facebook, voicing their opposition against the new highway in the Vere Gorge (Berikisvhili and Sichinava 2018: 3-4).

The year of 2011 is considered a turning point in the context of urban protests and the claim to the 'Right to the City' in Tbilisi. The main reason was the organisation of permanent demonstrations against the reconstruction of Gudiashvili Square in the heart of Old Tbilisi by *Tiflis Hamkari*. Even though the battle already started in 2007, the protests attracted an unprecedented number of participants from different fields. This was partly due to the 'eventful' programming and dramaturgy of the

protests, which involved theatrical performances, bands, exhibitions, and food and handicraft markets. In the end, the square and its surrounding nineteenth-century buildings were saved through its urban activism. As the festive atmosphere of the Gudiashvili protests proved to be successful, other activists decided to adopt similar techniques in different urban movements (Dundua et al. 2022a: 1429-30).

One significant activist group that took over the creative tactics of the Gudiashvili square protests was *Guerilla Gardening*. Founded shortly after the change of Georgian leadership in 2012, this organisation managed to stand at the forefront of urban activism in Tbilisi. Despite the claim of opposition coalition Georgian Dream (GD) to care about cultural heritage and urban development in their electoral program, no critical changes were observed regarding attitudes towards urban spaces following their victory (Berikisvhili and Sichinava 2018: 4). Unlike *Tiflis Hamkari*, *Guerilla Gardening* is not a structured organisation nor an NGO. As stated on their Facebook page: 'we [Guerilla Gardening] have no office but rather operate through this Facebook page [...] All our events are advertised on the wall of this group and anyone who would like to join, can easily join and participate' (About [Guerrilla gardening Tbilisi]: n.d.). The grassroots movement provided a platform for volunteers to meet and mobilise themselves against the loss of green space in the city. One of their first initiatives involved the large-scale planting and taking care of trees and plants across Tbilisi.

The most famous action of *Guerilla Gardening* remains the Vake Park protests ('Defend Vake Park'), which was a 6-year battle against the construction of a hotel in an important part of Tbilisi's public space. Similarly to the Gudiashvili Square protests, a diverse group of actors came together to claim their urban rights and engage in innovative practices (OC Media 2019). Despite this case's success, urban activists in Georgia's capital still face substantial issues in achieving their goals. This can be observed in the more recent demonstrations ('No to Panorama Tbilisi!') against the controversial Panorama complex: an enormous elite business and tourism construction project initiated by Georgia's richest man and former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili - involving USD 0.5 billion (Transparency International 2014). Although the protests brought together a political community of different urban activist groups under the 'Together' movement, big capital proved to be a

structural obstacle in claiming and expressing urban citizenship in Tbilisi. As noted by Lela Rekhviashvili et al. (2020: 89), 'The Panorama Tbilisi protests showed the potential of unity and simultaneously exposed the weaknesses of urban activism in Georgia.'

Looking at the past three decades, the dynamics of urban protest in Tbilisi have unfolded against a backdrop of significant socio-political shifts and urban transformations. While the roots of urban activism can be traced back to the nation's post-independence era, Georgia has a long history of protest movements, including those with nationalistic undertones during the weakening of the Soviet Union. The emergence of organisations such as *Tiflis Hamkari* and *Guerilla Gardening*, as well as the adoption of innovative protest techniques marked a turning point, with the 2011 Gudiashvili Square protests as a pivotal event. However, urban activism in Georgia's capital still deals with structural challenges as can be demonstrated by the contrasting outcomes of urban movements following 2011. While 'Defend Vake Park' was successful in accomplishing its aims, 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' faced more difficulties.

1.2 Research Puzzle

This thesis seeks to explore the varying degrees of impact of urban protest in post-socialist Eurasia: a region with a vibrant landscape of urban actors, activities and claims to spaces (Darieva and Neugebauer 2020). Despite the initial lack of academic literature on urban activism and concepts of 'The Right to The City' in the post-Soviet space, this thesis contributes to the growing trend of research in recent years. It is important to understand the dynamics of urban protest in cities of this area given their diverse contexts and paths in the wake of Soviet collapse. These various trajectories are often connected to larger, complex developments concerning the loss and (re-)construction of public space (Neugebauer and Rekhviashvili 2015).

One city in post-socialist Eurasia that stands out for its transformation and growth of urban activism is Tbilisi, Georgia. Scholars (Berikishvili and Sichinava 2018: p. 1) have pointed out that protests in the city experienced a change 'from spontaneous

activism to social movements.' However, the outcomes of urban protest aimed at protecting public space have been varied: while one of the most prominent examples of urban activism in Tbilisi, 'Defend Vake Park', was considered to be a success, other cases, such as 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', were deemed to be rather unsuccessful. Considering the contrasting experiences of urban social movements in Tbilisi in reaching its objectives, this research aims to understand how these differences are shaped.

Traditionally, social movement scholars utilised the distinction of success/failure in assessing the impact of movement, focusing on to what extent the protests were able to reach its stated goals. This thesis, however, intends to go further and move beyond this binary by perceiving urban social movements as meaning-making processes. Here, meaning-making processes are explained as the 'collective contest over interpretation' (Kurzman 2008: p. 6), shaped by the ideals, discourse, and methods that survive and flourish after the decline of the movements. Despite the success or failure of a social movement, it is relevant to analyse processes of meaning-making since participants have engaged in practices that challenge dominant societal norms and structures. In this way, a broader and more nuanced perspective can be established on the outcome of a social movement.

1.3 Research Questions

By drawing on interviews with participants who were involved in 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', this research will answer the following question: How can the impact of urban protest focused on preserving public space be understood through the lens of meaning-making in post-socialist Tbilisi? This main question will be guided by two sub-questions, namely: (1) What are the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements?; and (2) What ideals, discourse and practices of 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' have survived and flourished?

1.4 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature and outlines the theoretical framework to be used for this study. It is organised into three parts: (1) Complexities of Public Space in the (Post-)Socialist City, (2) Urban Protest in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia and (3) Strengths and Weaknesses of Urban Protests. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical and conceptual framework of this thesis, followed by the research design and methods utilised during the data collection and analysis in Chapter 4. The analysis of this research can be found in Chapters 5 and 6, where the two sub-questions are discussed: (1) What are the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements?; and (2) What ideals, discourse and practices of 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' have survived and flourished? Chapter 5 introduces the two case studies and juxtaposes them. Chapter 6 focuses on participants' reflections on meaning-making after the decline of urban social movements. Chapter 7 will summarise the findings of this research and reflect on them in light of the literature review, and conceptual and theoretical discussion. Finally, it will provide an answer to the research question: How can the impact of urban protest focused on preserving public space be understood through the lens of meaning-making in post-socialist Tbilisi?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Complexities of Public Space in the (Post-)Socialist city

The notion of public space plays a central role in discussions of the 'Right to the City', which can be illustrated by research on urban social movements as well as by various grassroots initiatives aimed at shaping urban development. The concept of the 'Right to the City' was originally introduced by philosopher Henri Lefebvre, and later adopted by different scholars in fields ranging from human geography to social movements research (Harvey 2003; Mitchell 2003). The idea of the 'Right to the City' entails that citizens are not only entitled to inhabit the city, but also to take active part in decision-making processes that can change its living conditions and shape its future. According to David Harvey (2008: 23), key advocate of the concept, the 'Right to the City' is about 'a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation.' As he puts it, 'the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights' (ibid.).

It is important to consider the relationship between the 'Right to the City' and public space since individuals claim and realise their rights to the city in public spaces. Still, in academia and public debates, there is no coherent definition of public space. One interpretation by William H. Whyte (2012) is rather practical and design-oriented, describing urban public space as a city's open spaces that invite people to encounter each other and engage in urban experiences. Similarly, Anthony Orum and Zachary Neal (2009: 2) argue that public spaces connote 'all areas that are open and accessible to all members of the public in a society, in principle, though not necessarily in practice.' In contrast, Don Mitchell (2003) gives another perspective on public space which is closely tied to the concept of the 'Right to the City' and views public space as a platform for expressing conflicts, political struggles, and social contradictions in public. The scholar makes the distinction between state-sanctioned 'public' spaces and spaces that become public through the activism of citizens who

occupy and transform them. In the same vein, Harvey (2011) highlights the function of public space as the primary means of political communication.
Setha Low and Neil Smith (2006) propose a rather pessimistic view of public space and write about its disappearance due to wider developments related to neoliberalism. However, as the authors write, 'new events, new technologies, new ways of responding to the neoliberalisation of public space, new forms of social organisation [...] are always creating alternative new spaces of and for public political expression' (Low and Smith 2006: 16). Feminist writers like Glenna Matthews (1992) argue against the reduction of politics to the mobilisation of the privileged and politically recognised at a given time. They stress the importance of acknowledging the politics of marginalised actors in claims over public space, which contrasts with that of more recognised and legitimised civil society groups. Furthermore, scholars such as Michel de Certeau (1984) emphasise the significance of examining not only formal and institutionalised forms of political participation but also the daily practices. In this sense, the meanings of what behaviours and discourses are recognised and legitimate in public space can be transformed. Hence, critical reflections on public space advocate for considering the variety of actors, everyday practices and institutional contexts in studying the politics of public space (Stenning et al. 2011).

While much of the abovementioned literature on public space deals with the concept in a broad sense and mainly from a Western perspective, some authors (Zhelnina 2014; Kalyukin et al. 2015; Neugebauer and Rekhviashvili 2015; Darieva and Neugebauer 2020) point out that research on post-socialist public space remains limited despite the various urban contexts and trajectories of former socialist cities. Still, scholarship on public space in post-socialist cities does exist, particularly related to their unique features in comparison to their Western European counterparts (Stanilov 2007; Hirt 2012; Mantey and Kępkowicz 2018). These characteristics are connected to wider dynamics of privatisation and commercialisation in post-socialist countries. However, one needs to be careful about treating Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia as a single region on the basis only of their common socialist experience due to risks of homogenisation. In fact, significant differences can be observed in terms of political openness and

institutions, reform trajectories and civil societies in the area (Buyandelgeriyn 2008; Zhelnina 2014).

Tsypylma Darieva and Carola S. Neugebauer (2020) observed that most studies on public space in post-socialist cities focus on the EU-integrated part of Europe. For example, Sonia Hirt (2014) writes about how throughout the period between 1945 and 1990, the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe actively used public space to consolidate power and reshape the fundamental structure of society. In the 1990s, she states, public spaces came under threat as a result of extreme economic challenges, the weak position of public institutions and neoliberalism as an ideology (ibid.: 7-8). György Csomós et al. (2021) assess the access of urban green spaces in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The authors conclude that even though historical legacies of communism are crucial in understanding the availability of green spaces, disparities in such spaces today are increasingly connected to new patterns of segregation (ibid.: 6). Dorota Mantey and Agnieszka Kępkowicz (2018) critically engage with the concept of public spaces and argue that there is an increasing number of different types of spaces of public nature in Central and Eastern Europe. The authors contend that these complications develop in a context of intensive suburbanisation and a lack of spaces that are fully public (ibid.: 651).

As for the countries that were part of the USSR, the long-established experience of Soviet state socialism has left its mark on its public spaces despite their diverse contexts and trajectories. As Anna Zhelnina (2013: 58) confirms, public spaces in the former Soviet Union were severely constrained in their utility, primarily due to extensive political control and surveillance, resulting in the transformation of 'everyone's space' into 'no-one's space'. Indeed, the life of Soviet citizens was effectively divided between public and private, which is the focus point in the work of Finn Sivert Nielsen (2004). The anthropologist introduces a spatial metaphor to analyse this dual nature: while *prospekt* (avenue) symbolises civilisation and is characterised by maintenance and order, *dvor* (backyard) represents a place where people actually live and engage with one another. This public-private divide spilled over into the city, obstructing its open spaces from functioning as public places where interactions among strangers and diversity could happen. Karl Schloegel complicates the division of public and private space by highlighting the case of the

communal apartment, *kommunalka*, in Soviet times. Even though a *kommunalka* included both public (i.e. kitchen) and private (rooms of individual families) spaces, clear distinctions could not be maintained in practice. In this case, he questions whether we 'should [...] rather speak of a collapse of privacy' (ibid.: 320).

The volume by Darieva et al. (2011) points out that public space has been subject to ambivalence in the wake of Soviet collapse: while possibilities emerged for reconstructing public spaces post-1990, at the same time those places lost their publicness due to new exclusive power structures. Thus, urban spaces in the post-Soviet space are shaped and defined by the coexistence of old and new social orders. Zhelnina (2014: 235) argues that post-socialist societies are confronted with a dual set of challenges: firstly, the inequalities shaped by capitalism, and secondly, the legacies of their totalitarian and authoritarian histories. Darieva and Neugebauer (2020) stress those same challenges as dominant trends in the countries comprising the former Soviet Union, having a significant influence on urban development and urbanites. The authors argue that these tendencies impact public space as well as semi-private spaces, such as housing and courtyards (ibid.: 10). Alexander Kalyukin et al. (2015) discuss a paradigm shift in post-socialist change, which involves the reimagining and redefinition of the public and public space. The authors claim that analysing aspects of public space is helpful for understanding the way 'these transformations are recasting the urban fabric of post-Soviet cities' (ibid.: 1).

Even though various authors (Zhelnina 2014; Neugebauer and Rekhviashvili 2015; Kalyukin et al. 2015; Darieva and Neugebauer 2020) have argued that there is a lack of academic literature focusing on the public space of post-Soviet cities, the recent years have seen a growing trend of material dealing with such issues. In the context of Georgia alone, many scholars have written on this topic. For example, Joseph Salukvadze and Kristof Van Assche (2022) analyse changes in Tbilisi's urban context since the fall of the Soviet Union and categorise its urban transformation into four phases: (1) 'do it yourself urbanism' in the 1990s; (2) 'investor urbanism' from the early 2000s; (3) 'politicised planning' closer to 2010; (4) and 'revisionist planning' as the current phase. The authors argue that Tbilisi has witnessed a significant decline in public spaces in recent decades, giving way to the privatisation of assets and resources with public value (ibid.: 11). Lela Rekhviasvhili (2015) writes about how the

post-revolutionary government in Georgia took control over public spaces in order to push for neoliberal marketisation policies. By drawing on the general 'end of public space' literature (Low and Smith 2006), the scholar illustrates how petty traders were removed from public spaces that were subject to privatisation (Rekhviashvili 2015: 491). David Gogishvili (2021) explores the loss of public space due to the increase of car ownership and the subsequent privatisation of courtyards for parking space. As a consequence, households living in residential buildings are developing strategies to safeguard spaces suitable for parking, restricting non-driving residents from utilising these previously public spaces for alternative purposes.

The authors mentioned in the previous paragraph commonly adopted the lens of social transformation in their work on public space in a post-socialist city, exploring the shift from socialism to capitalism as an essential aspect of their research. This thesis will adopt a similar perspective in terms of the fight for public space in Tbilisi. Furthermore, it will build on the literature concerning the complexities of public space in the (post-)socialist city by exploring how issues related to the loss of public space leads to the mobilisation of civil society. The following section will deal with this topic more deeply and provide an overview of scholarship on urban protest in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

2.2 Urban Protest in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia

The concept of 'urban social movements' was developed by Manuel Castells in his book *The Urban Question* (1972) and expanded on in *The City and the Grassroots* (1983). In the former, he introduced 'urban social movements' as the single mechanism that can cause structural change within dynamics of the urban system; while in the latter, such movements are characterised as mobilisations with an urban focus, capable of effecting profound structural social change and redefining the meanings attached to urban spaces (Castells 1983: 319-20). In his work, Castells was generally occupied with exploring the ways in which urban movements might lead to social change. More recently, Hans Pruijt (2007: 5115) defined urban movements as 'social movements through which citizens attempt to achieve some control over their urban environment. The urban environment comprises the built environment, the

social fabric of the city, and the local political process.' In view of Chris Pickvance (2003), certain political and social conditions should be present in order for civic activism to develop in urban space.

Urban movements generally have not been integrated fully with broader literature on social movement theory. According to Pickvance (2003), this development is connected to the work of Castells (1983) and his treatment of urban movements as *sui generi*. The author argues that the isolation of urban movements from other social movements carries certain advantages, such as the 'focus of urban movement writing on effects', 'the interest in political power' and a 'concentration on the political context in which urban movements developed' (ibid.: 103-4). At the same time, however, Pickvance observed several drawbacks, including the disconnect from social movement theory, neglect of mobilisation process and collective identities, and a division between voluntary associations and urban movements (ibid.). Margit Mayer (2013) has pointed out that urban movements have a distinct hybrid character compared to other social movements due to its cross-class collaboration in grassroots mobilisations. The political scientist argues that urban problems, such as those related to the environment and transport, commonly affect all classes. However, as Mayer (2013: 11) notes, 'all of them are affected by different strategic positions within the post-industrial neoliberal city'. Other scholars (Anna Domaradzka 2018) utilise social movement theory to analyse urban movement.

Urban movements that emerged in a context of neoliberal urban policies are perceived to be part of the broader 'Right to the City' demands. Against this background, Margit Mayer and Julie-Anne Boudreau (2012) note that city groups mobilise themselves in response to commercialisation projects, such as the revitalisation and privatisation of public space, development projects causing gentrification or investor-driven plans that disregard urban heritage. These collectives often represent lower-income groups and are fighting inequality and exploitation in urban decision-making processes that are dominated by more privileged and powerful individuals (ibid: 70). Similarly, Kerstin Jacobsson (2015: 1) stresses that 'urban grassroots mobilizations arise in response to new social cleavages and increased polarisation as a consequence of neoliberalisation and globalisation processes as well as the transformation of state power and authority.' Moreover,

Mayer and Boudreau (2012: 277) stress that urban movements are subject to critical changes and that those 'in the so-called transformation societies follow different patterns from those challenging the urbanism of Western democracies.'

In Western societies, urban protests and citizen participation in urban development have become integral aspects of civic life. Not only is the concept of the 'Right to the City' widely recognised, activities such as artist interventions in public spaces and resident engagement in neighbourhoods are also celebrated. These forms of urban activism are widely discussed in public and among scholars. Kerstin Jacobsson and Steven Saxonberg (2015) argue, in contrast, that this is not the case with urban activism in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. According to the authors, the society of this region is still represented in simplistic terms and portrayed as weak, passive and scared. Nonetheless, as Darieva and Neugebauer (2020) illustrate, Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia witness the emergence of dynamic and fluid urban-related civic initiatives. These range from localised protests and small-scale activities to mass movements that seek to bring about structural changes in urban life. Scholars such as Hirt (2012: 72) stress the importance of including Central and Eastern European and Eurasian cities in urban movements research as she explains that the trajectory of urban movements is different in the post-socialist city compared to the West due to the 'time-compressed manner' in which it has developed. Although literature on urban movements is generally focused on the West, the insights of scholars such as Mayer (2007) are relevant for cases around the globe; her descriptions of urban movements provide a diverse and multifaceted understanding of the concept.

A remarkable work in the context of urban protests in former post-socialist countries is that of Jacobsson (2015), which focuses on urban grassroots movements in Central and Eastern Europe. The sociologist writes that 'the inability of local (or central) government to meet the needs of a large proportion of the inhabitants have led to a wave of small-scale urban grassroots mobilisation in the region' (ibid.: 22). Among the protests in the region, she identified the most common topics as advocating for urban policy reforms, securing safe living conditions, promoting sustainable housing practices, protecting green spaces, opposing gentrification, and resisting the privatisation and commercialisation of public areas. Furthermore, she emphasises

the richness of urban activism in Central and Eastern Europe and writes that 'some are more reactive while others more proactive, some more progressive and others more conservative in their claims, some disruptive in their actions while others - most in fact - are more moderate in their form of protest' (ibid: 3). Although some authors have argued that the most academic work regarding urban protests in Eastern Europe and Eurasia is mostly focused on the EU-integrated part of the post-socialist world (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2015), recent years have observed the growth of literature dealing with these issues in the Caucasus (Gurchiani 2022).

The work of Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019) provides a comprehensive analysis of the empirical and theoretical entry points that challenge the concept of a weak civil society in Central and Eastern Europe. The authors emphasise the significance of examining everyday protests and less visible, grassroots activities by drawing on the concept of James Scott's 'infrapolitics' (1992). Infrapolitics refers to various small acts of resistance and everyday forms of political agency practised by subaltern groups and individuals that do not have the formal power nor ability to challenge larger power structures. Furthermore, Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019) stress the potential of urban spaces in shaping political subjectivity and utilise the need to comprehend the role of informality. Lela Rekhviashvili (2022) shares this view and emphasises the importance of inclusivity in urban activism. The author argues that the prevailing interpretation of urban protests in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Eurasia tends to be centred on what is lacking vis-a-vis the West and excessively NGO-focused, failing to fully grasp the nuanced political dynamics occurring in this region. Instead, she proposes to talk about the political society of subaltern groups in Eastern Europe and Eurasia: refocusing on what is present politically rather than what is absent (ibid.: 226-7).

Darieva and Neugebauer (2020) stress that even though everyday activism may remain to be unrecognised politically, they have the potential to give meaning to and mobilise other movements. Ketevan Gurchiani (2022) illustrates this point by her work on bottom-up resistance to claim urban spaces in Tbilisi. The anthropologist analysed tactics of planting trees of special value on strategic locations and argues that these tactics eventually became part of the repertoire of the more established urban movements. Furthermore, Rekhviashvili (2022) described how street vendors

in Tbilisi are claiming public space in their opposition to the government despite being denied these places. As the author writes, 'they have used a variety of conventional and creative resistance tactics unmatched by any civil society group' (ibid.: 222). Despite the considerable personal sacrifices made by street vendors to engage in such political acts, Rekhviashvili argues that they are not recognised as an essential part of civil society by media, CSOs and public authorities. Costanza Curro (2017) assessed informal practices as resistance, utilising the case of *birzha*: a group of teenage or young adult males that regularly gather in public space, including urban areas. Curro concludes that due to the romanticisation of informality, the significant effects that certain practices can have on broader social and political discussions are often overlooked.

This section outlined the growing literature on urban protest in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, which this thesis will contribute to. Even though literature on urban movement remains to be largely disconnected from other social movements, this thesis will aim to integrate the two. As the next chapter demonstrates, a social movement framework will be applied to two urban movements in Tbilisi. Moreover, this research will elaborate on the intersection of recognised and unrecognised forms of resistance by analysing two urban social movements from the perspective of their participants. Now, debates will be explored regarding the strengths and weaknesses of urban protest.

2.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of Urban Social Movements

One of the most widely accepted approaches to understanding the success or failure of social movements is rooted in the Political Process Theory (PPT), which focuses on the political and institutional context in which such movements develop (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1998; McAdam 1999). Within this theoretical framework, the concept of political opportunities holds significant importance. Sidney Tarrow (1998: 85) defines political opportunities as the 'consistent – but necessarily formal or permanent – dimension of the political environment that provides incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations of success or failure.' Charles Tilly (1978) points out that the mere existence of political

opportunities may not be sufficient for a social movement to succeed; in addition, mobilising structures that seek change are also essential.

Besides political opportunities and mobilisation structures, PPT scholars (McAdam et al. 1996; Tilly 2006; Tarrow 2011) also highlight the significance of and protest cycles, contentious repertoires, and framing processes. In fact, the emergence of political opportunities has been connected to the cycles of contention. Sidney Tarrow (2011: 199) defines such cycles as 'a phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilised to less mobilised sectors.' While some scholars (McAdam 1982) acknowledge the strong relationship between political opportunities and protest cycles, others (Inclan 2009) claim that the development of political opportunities hinder cycles of contention. Tilly (2006) explains the repertoire of contention as the different strategies used throughout the protest cycle; and Doug McAdam et al. (1996) described 'framing' as 'the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action'.

Opponents of PTT (McAdam et al. 2001) criticise the structural and invariant aspects of the theory and, instead, redirected their attention to a more dynamic approach studying processes of 'contentious politics'. Instead of opportunities, mobilising structures and framing processes, the authors try to identify mechanisms of environmental, relational, and cognitive nature across various social movements. While early studies of political opportunities centred around a small number of variables, new variables have been added since the 1980s based on several case studies and trans-national comparisons (Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1991). On the one hand, this development has strengthened the explanatory potential of the term, but on the other hand, its specificity weakened (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 17). Other critics (Melucci 1989) have raised their concerns about PPT due to its element of 'political reductionism'; this critique voiced that political process theorists have overemphasised politics at the expense of the cultural context in which such movements operate.

Alternatively, Donatella Della Porta analyses social movements from a multidimensional and interdisciplinary perspective, combining the fields of

sociology, politics, and communication theory. Her approach allows us to dive deeper into processes, tactics, and effects of social movements. In her book *Social Movements in Times of Austerity* (2015), the author explores how contemporary social movements are shaped by the challenges that are posed by the neoliberal crisis. Charles Kurzman (2008) incorporates cultural studies into the study of social movements, and places meaning-making processes at the heart of his analysis. He raises the following question: 'What would happen if we not only recognize meaning-making as an important facet of social movement mobilisation, but privilege it as the central feature of such phenomena?' (ibid.: 5). As social movements aim to resist prevailing norms and institutions, its activities could lead participants and observers to rethink and renegotiate existing meanings. Instead of assessing social movements based on the achievements of certain objectives, Kurzman (ibid.: 6-10) is interested in the ideals, discourses and practices that survive and flourish. In this way, the outcomes of protests move beyond the binary distinction of success/failure.

Another explanation for the emergence of social movement and the strength of protests is the WUNC (Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment) framework, originally developed by Tilly (1994). It comprises four essential elements: (1) worthiness, (2) unity, (3) numbers, and (4) commitment. These elements encompass various aspects of information about the actors involved in social movements. Worthiness refers to the behaviour exhibited by individuals participating in protests; unity and commitment focus on the beliefs and attitudes of the protesters; and numbers represent who the people are that comprise the movement. As Tilly (2006: 291), writes: 'W x U x N x C = Impact'. The sociologist claims that WUNC is effective since the four components increase the likelihood for a social movement 'to enter, realign, or disrupt the existing polity' (Tilly 1999: 262). Ruud Wouters and Stefaan Walgrave (2017) build and expand on Tilly's concept of WUNC in understanding social movements. The scholars argue for the significance of examining the identity and behaviour of protesting actors when studying social movements and add a fifth dimension to the theory: diversity. These features of protest may influence the 'calculations, attitudes and ultimately even the behaviour of those who observe protest' (ibid.: 2) In contrast to PTT, dWUNC demonstrates the importance of agency in the examination of social movement outcomes.

In the Georgian context, Lia Tsuladze et al. (2018) identify two main challenges to urban civic participation and inclusive policy making, which can be divided into top-down and bottom-up perspectives. From a top-down view, the scholars stress the problem of two governments accusing the activists of being affiliated with political parties, thereby framing them as politically biased and effectively marginalising their participation in the urban decision-making process; from a bottom-up view, the study demonstrates that the activists have limited policy advocacy capacities, hindering the perspective of inclusive urban policy making. Despite significant consolidation of urban movements in Tbilisi, Rekhviashvili et al. (2020) note that big capital still wins over urban mobilisers. Hence, urban movements of Tbilisi are embedded in wider democratisation challenges, demonstrating the complex and interdependent nature of urban activism in the Caucasian state. Salome Dundua et al. (2022a) wrote the first article on urban movements defending public space in Georgia, examining the 'Save Gudiashvili Square' initiative. According to the author, the urban movement was mostly successful due to its 'framing process, recruitment tactics, and protest repertoire, coupled with changes in the political system' (ibid.: 1413). Furthermore, Dundua et al. (2022b: 21) compare two other urban movements in Tbilisi and argue that the success of a movement is related to '[a] properly planned strategy, [the] investor/investment factor, and [a] favourable political context'.

This section has discussed both conventional and critical approaches to the strengths and weaknesses of (urban) social movements. This thesis seeks to enrich the discussion on urban protest by transcending simplistic success/failure dichotomies and, instead, focusing on the survival and flourishing of ideals, discourse and practices. As dynamics of urban activism in Georgia is connected to a complex interplay of political, economic, and social elements, their multifaceted opportunities and challenges should be analysed through a broader and more nuanced lens. Therefore, alternative frameworks will be utilised such as the dWUNC model (Wouters and Walgrave 2018), as well as the approach by Kurzman (2008) of social movements as meaning-making processes.

3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.1 Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the research question (i.e. how can the impact of urban protest focused on preserving public space be understood through the lens of meaning-making in post-socialist Tbilisi?), this thesis employs the framework of both Wouters and Walgrave (2017) and Kurzman (2008) during its analyses in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

In Chapter 5, two urban social movements are analysed in accordance with Wouters and Walgrave (2017), that reintroduced and elaborated on Charles Tilly's WUNC (1978) concept on social movements. WUNC consists of four key elements, which are (1) worthiness, (2) unity, (3) numbers, and (4) commitment. These features represent all different information about the actors in social movements: worthiness relates to the behaviour of those involved in the protests, unity and commitment focuses on the beliefs and attitudes of the protesters, and numbers show the amount of people protesting. Wouters and Walgrave (2017) argue that it is important to consider who protests and how these actors behave while protesting when studying social movements. Therefore, they add a fifth dimension to the framework: diversity (d). By utilising dWUNC, this thesis aims to integrate the research of social movements to urban movements. In the following section, the different elements of dWUNC will be discussed in detail.

3.1.1 Concepts of dWUNC

3.1.1.1 Worthiness

Worthiness refers to the way protesters behave during their activism. Charles Tilly characterises worthy behaviour as 'eloquent' (Tilly 1994: 13), 'disciplined' (Tilly 2008: 144) and not 'disreputable' (Tilly 2006: 291). This suggests that non-violent and non-disruptive conduct is considered worthy, in contrast to actions of violent and disruptive nature. The demonstration of worthiness by a social movement is important as it contributes to the recognition necessary to deserve attention and

engagement from various stakeholders. It is essential to note that worthiness and worthy behaviour are relative phenomena that acquire their meaning from their specific cultural contexts (Wouters and Walgrave 2017: 6). What may be considered to be acceptable and legitimate behaviour during a protest can be perceived differently across various cultures. For example, the use of violence during protests might be way more tolerated in one country compared to another. The concept of worthiness encompasses multiple dimensions, making it arguably the most problematic component among all (ibid.: 21).

3.1.1.2 Unity

Unity is the component that relates to the agreement and alignment among the different participants of a social movement. It examines the extent to which these individuals share a common message and make compromises to convey that message. Since the achievement of unity primarily exists within the minds of the protesters, it cannot be observed in a direct manner. As a consequence, protestors try to convey unity by engaging in visual and behavioural tactics, such as using certain symbols, customs or flags. Tilly (1999: 262) points out that unity within a protest movement can be seen as a form of 'mystification' and, therefore, does not mirror reality. The dynamics of unity can be complex, as protests often involve people with diverse interests, ideologies, and identities. While a group may seem unified on the surface, underlying divisions may still be present among different individuals and groups. When such internal differences become visible, the cohesiveness of the protestors might decrease, leading to the weakening of a social movement (Wouters and Walgrave 2017: 6). The notion of unity also raises an important question about the representation of voices within a movement: does a seemingly unified movement (unintentionally) marginalise or overshadow the perspectives of other minority groups?

3.1.1.3 Numbers

Numbers might be the most straightforward component of Tilly's WUNC theory. In fact, some social movement theorists (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 171-3), even talk about the 'logic of numbers' when discussing different elements of social movements. Tilly (1978) himself explains the relevance of numbers by discussing the connection

between the emergence of social movements and the development of democracy. At the heart of any democracy lies the principle of citizen equality, he argues, wherein each individual's vote carries equal weight. As a consequence, in the context of electoral democracy, numbers have taken an essential role within the WUNC framework. The significance of numbers extends beyond just the symbolic value of demonstrating substantial support for a cause. Social movement's legitimacy and prominence are, to a great extent, determined by the mobilisation of a large number of participants. When this is the case, a powerful message is sent to both the government and the public, stressing the importance and urgency of the issues at hand. Furthermore, the size of a protest is one of the key criteria to determine how much news coverage a social movement received (Wouters and Walgrave 2017: 7).

However, one should remain critical when examining who is recognised as an actor and whose actions are considered to be valid within a social movement. These concerns are emphasised in the works of Scott (1992) and Rekhviashvili (2022). The former author talks about 'infrapolitics', stressing the importance of smaller, everyday forms of acts of resistance by marginalised groups that lack formal authority or capacity to fight larger power structures. The latter scholar questions who is considered to be part of 'civil society' in the context of Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and proposes to use a more inclusive concept: political society. Political society includes groups and individuals who are engaging in political activities but are not acknowledged as such, and do not strive to be part of civil society (ibid.: 219). Talking about such subaltern groups, the scholar states that, 'they cannot shape media discourses, have a presence in social networks or play a part in local knowledge production. They will hardly ever get legal support and guidance if imprisoned or fined. They will not feature academic studies chronicling and analysing urban movements in Tbilisi' (ibid.: 226).

3.1.1.4 Commitment

Commitment of protestors is defined as 'persistence in costly or risky activity, declarations of readiness to persevere, resistance to attack' (Tilly 1999: 261). It raises questions about the genuine dedication of the involved individuals, and whether politicians are willing to translate their dissatisfaction into electoral action. A high

level of commitment typically entails a long-term commitment to the cause and demonstrates that the movement is not existing temporarily. It is often reflected by the ability of a movement to preserve momentum and engagement over a longer period, beyond brief moments of public attention or media coverage. While commitment is an attitude and cannot be directly observed, it can be shown by the persistence and willingness of engaging in different actions (Wouters and Walgrave 2017: 8). The commitment of the protesters might influence the reaction of those in power or the wider society. Since a committed and persistent movement is more likely to be perceived as a threat, there is a higher chance for officials to engage in dialogue or turn to repressive measures. It is worth mentioning that protesters who are deeply committed to a cause may not always exhibit worthy behaviour. Their passion and deep care for a problem can lead to feelings of anger and might overshadow more sober behaviour (ibid.: 10).

3.1.1.5 Diversity

The component of diversity is an extension of Tilly's original WUNC theory, which is introduced by Wouters and Walgrave (2017). Even though Tilly recognised the importance of diversity in protest, he did not establish it as a distinct component of WUNC. Similarly to numbers, diversity enhances the democratic legitimacy of a social movement. It goes beyond the mere count of individuals and focuses on the collective's ability to represent not only the usual participants but also mirror the broader segments of society. While large numbers alone may suggest a certain sense of representativeness, true representation is formed by the support of individuals with different ideologies, gender and ages. It includes a diverse range of voices and perspectives, and reflects how inclusive and participatory the movement is. Walgrave and Verhulst (2009) demonstrated a strong correlation between the diversity of protest and the level of public opinion support for a movement's objectives. It is important to note that unity and diversity can be considered to be each other's opposite: the more diversity there is among protestors, the harder it comes for the crowd to unite. However, unity and diversity still differ conceptually; while unity refers to the ideas of people, which is embedded in a shared attitude or belief, diversity relates to the people that support these ideas (Wouters and Walgrave 107: 9-10).

3.1.1.6 A Critical Note on dWUNC

According to Wouters and Walgrave (2017), all components of dWUNC are important to strengthen a social movement. However, the result of dWUNC is not reflected by simply adding up the scores of each element. It is important to consider that a low score of one component might nullify the impact of others. For example, a social movement consisting of entirely unworthy or uncommitted participants - regardless of their number, diversity or unification - can only be powerful in certain cases (Tilly 2006: 291). Furthermore, it is also possible for components to contradict each other: in fact, it is hardly possible to maximise all elements simultaneously. In case of a diverse crowd during a social movement, it is likely for the protestors to be less united (Wouters and Walgrave 2017: 10). Despite these considerations, the theory of dWUNC is still able to provide valuable insights in the analysis of social movements due to its ability to reintroduce agency to the study of protest outcomes.

3.1.2 Concept of Meaning-Making

In Chapter 6, this thesis utilises the argument of Charles Kurzman (2008) of centring meaning-making at the heart of analysis in case of (urban) social movement impact. In this context, a cultural perspective on meaning-making processes is utilised, which is the 'collective contest over interpretation' (Kurzman 2008: p. 6). This contest is formed by the ideals, discourse, and methods that survive and flourish after the decline of the movements. In line with this theory, it is important to analyse processes of meaning-making in urban social movements when assessing its impact as participants of the movements have the potential to challenge conventional societal norms and structures regardless of its success or failure. Hence, 'Defend Vake Park!' and 'No To Panorama Tbilisi' will be assessed based on ideals, discourse and practices that survived and flourished instead of focusing on the achievements of certain objectives. In this way, the chapter aims to move beyond the binary distinction of success/failure when it comes to social movement outcomes.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

Even though this thesis studies two urban movements, the analyses focus on urban activism within these movements more broadly. Hence, it underscores how different

types of activities happen on a broad spectrum: from everyday activism to urban movements (see Figure 1). Its boundaries are often blurred and overlapping in terms of organisational forms, activities, resources, claims and places.

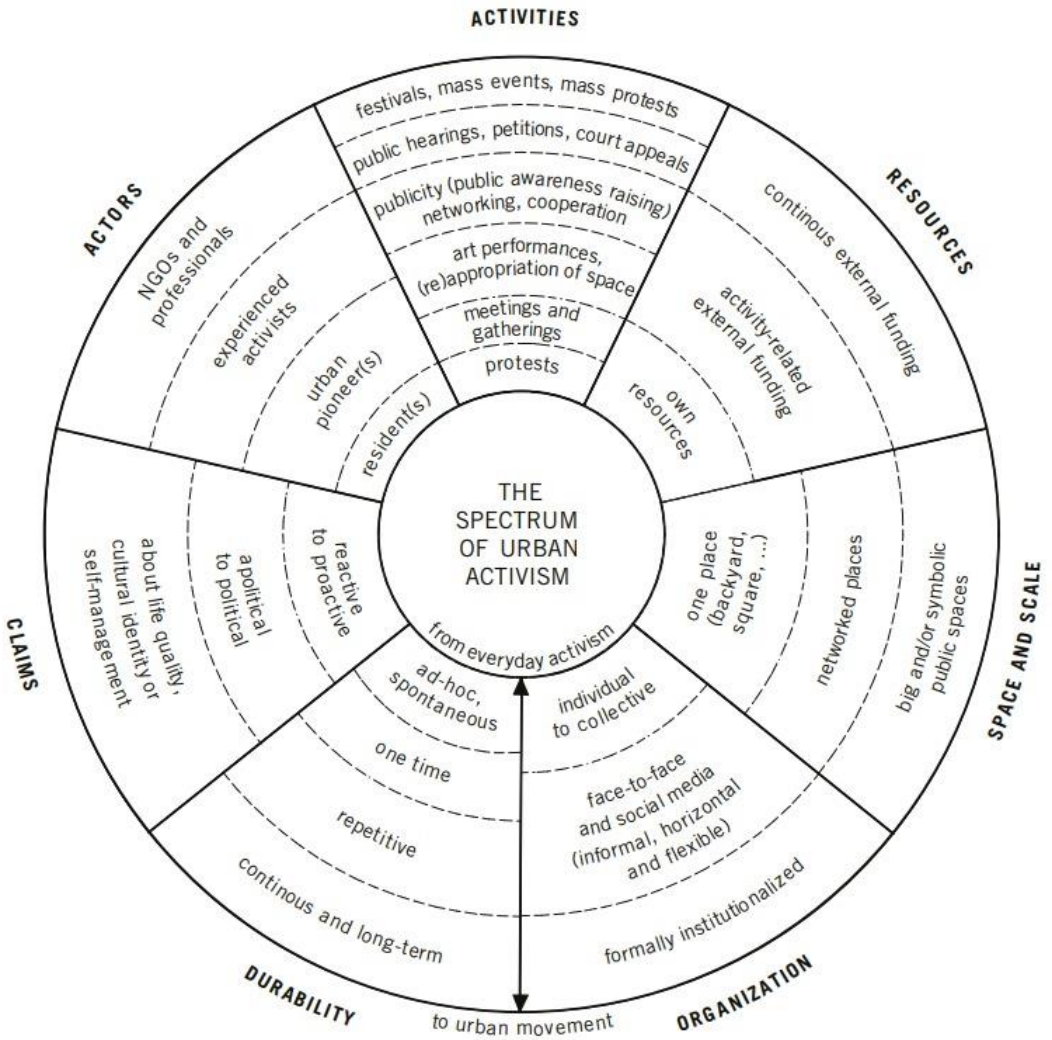

Figure 1 (Source: C. Neugebauer, T. Darieva, J. Nieper in Urban Activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia: Strategies and Practices 2020: 15)

As can be observed from Figure 1, urban activism is able to describe locally driven, every-day protests that often happen on a micro-level or develop without any specific institutional framework. These activities may, in turn, affect and mobilise other types of urban activism or even movements. It is of significant importance to highlight the inclusive nature of urban activism, as urban protests in post-Soviet Eurasia are often interpreted through a narrow, NGO-focused lens which does not accurately capture what is happening politically in this region (Rekhviashvili 2022). This thesis deals specifically with urban activism against the loss of public space, and uses a political definition of public space that is connected to the 'Right to the City' concept. In line with Mitchell (2003), this thesis treats public space as a critical arena for expressing conflicts, political struggles, and social contradictions openly. Moreover, it acknowledges Harvey's (2011) point that the fundamental role of public space as the primary medium for political communication.

4 Methodological Framework

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a comparative research design (small-*n*), which is focused on two case studies of urban protest in Tbilisi aimed at protecting public space. This research discusses urban protest after the parliamentary change in 2012 since this was considered to be a turning point by various social movements, including those focused on urban-related issues. As political possibilities were believed to increase in this period, the government change led to diversification of voices and a heightened level of activism within urban movements was followed (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 94).

The most different systems design (MDSD) will be utilised as two urban movements ('Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!') of Tbilisi are being compared that have contrasting outcomes. While the former is considered to be a successful case of urban activism in Georgia, the latter is seen as not successful (Dundua et al. 2022b). However, rather than engaging with the binary distinction of success/failure, this thesis will use the framework of Kurzman (2008) of meaning-making in social movements. It will answer the following question: How can the impact of urban protest focused on preserving public space be understood through the lens of meaning-making in post-socialist Georgia? To do so, firstly, the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements will be discussed, and, secondly, the ideals, discourse and practices of 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' that have survived and flourished will be explored.

The study analyses two types of research data. Firstly, and most importantly, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten urban activists and/or members of urban-related NGOs that were involved in the protests of the two selected urban movements. These interviews generate the majority of the data for the analyses in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, providing insights on the main similarities and differences between 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', as well as on the ideals, discourse and practices of the two movements. The reason semi-

structured interviews are chosen as the most appropriate method to collect the data for this research is because it allows for a further exploration of certain themes and responses that are relevant to understand the multifaceted aspects of impact in urban activism. To analyse the interview transcripts, content analysis is chosen as the best research tool for the analyses to identify common words, themes or concepts discussed by the participants through which valuable conclusions can be made related to meaning-making processes in urban social movements (Blee and Taylor 2002; William 2015; Sheppard 2020). Secondly, media articles and research conducted by urban-related NGOs are analysed to describe the developments that form the backdrop of this thesis' analysis; they supplement and contextualise the semi-structured interviews.

4.2 Interview Recruitment, Selection Process and Questions

Interviewees were recruited through the snowball method (Naderifar et al. 2017). Participants of this research were involved in the following organisations: *Green Alternative*, *Green First*, *Guerrilla Gardening Tbilisi*, *Initiative for Public Space*, *My City is Killing Me*, *Tiflis Hamkari*, and *Urban Reactor*. These organisations have been among the most active, visible, and prominent ones that were involved in the two selected urban movements.

The first respondents were recommended to me by my thesis supervisor (Ketevan Gurchiani), supervisor at *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung South Caucasus* (Irina Seperteladze), supervisor at *ICOMOS Georgia* (Mariam Khurtsilava), and a PhD student at the *Ilia State University* (Esma Berikishvili). I also created a post on Twitter asking for people to contact me if they were involved in the urban protests 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. Between 22 March and 1 May 2023, 8 interviews were conducted in-person and 2 over Zoom. The interviews took 45 minutes on average. Respondents were selected based on age, gender and their engagement with the urban movements chosen for this research to gain an inclusive perspective on the protests by taking as many different experiences as possible into account. All names, gender and occupations of the respondents are anonymised in this thesis.

The interview questions seek to understand the interviewees' personal background; connection to Tbilisi's urban space; motivations for joining urban activism in Tbilisi; view on other participants; contribution to urban development; specific role in protests; reflections on both effective strategies and challenges in urban activism; collaboration with stakeholders; and ideas on what makes protest successful or not. The interviews were transcribed through *Revoldiv*, and manually edited in case the AI tool functioned incorrectly.

4.3 Research Ethics

Before starting this project, I had to take several ethical considerations since the process of data gathering involved human subjects. In line with the policy of the University of Glasgow, I obtained ethical approval from the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Even though my ethics application was a low-risk case, I have demonstrated that I took the necessary steps to assure the safety and wellbeing of the participants and that I am aware of any potential ethical issues while carrying out the research. In terms of personal safety, I scheduled all interviews on campus at Ilia State University, where I completed my mobility. Considering risks of causing distress to participants, I designed the interview questions to be non-invasive in terms of personally sensitive issues. Still, I reflected on the ways I can respond properly in case of distress during the interviews, which I included in my ethics application.

Before starting the interviews, I verbally informed the participants about the details of my research project. Additionally, I brought three documents to the interviews. Firstly, I provided the Plain Language Statement (PLS), which entailed the purpose of the study, what will be required of the participant, as well as the consequences of their participation. Here, information regarding confidentiality was discussed. Secondly, a Privacy Note was given that explained respondents about the use of their personal data by the University of Glasgow. Thirdly, the interviewees were asked to sign a Consent Form, in which they officially agree to their participation and its implications. Throughout the research, confidentiality of the participants was

ensured as de-identified the data by replacing the names of the participants by a code, correlating to a number from 1 to 10 (e.g. Interviewee/Respondent 8).

4.4 Research Limitations

This study has multiple limitations. Firstly, as I do not speak Georgian on a satisfactory level, I could not interview two respondents that were interested in participating. These potential respondents were important and active members of the two selected urban movements of this research. For one interview, I managed to find a translator; however, the person cancelled our interview last-minute. For the interview with the other respondent, I did not have the time and resources to find a translator. The lack of Georgian language skills also prevented me from reading sources in Georgian language that could be potentially helpful for this research.

Secondly, as a Dutch-Polish MA student that has only lived in Tbilisi for one year at the point of submitting the thesis, I have a biased perspective on urban protest in Georgia that will unconsciously affect my research. Moreover, since this research was conducted in English, a danger exists that I have interpreted certain data without being fully aware of the cultural context.

Thirdly, since this research is based on only ten interviews due to time constraints, the study carries risks of essentialisation. During this project, I tried to minimise these risks by being as reflective as possible about my biases and critically discuss my findings with peers at *Ilia State University*, colleagues at *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung South Caucasus* and Georgian friends. Furthermore, I was careful with drawing generalisations based on the small sample size and supplemented the data gathered from interviews with secondary data. However, since this thesis deals with qualitative research, the quality and depth of the interviews is more important than the quantity.

4.5 Road Map of Thesis

This thesis aims to answer the following question: How can the impact of urban protest focused on preserving public space be understood through the lens of meaning-making in post-socialist Georgia? In the following two chapters, the bulk of this research based on the semi-structured interviews will be presented in two chapters that will discuss the two sub-questions: (1) What are the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements? (Chapter 5); and (2) What ideals, discourse and practices of 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' have survived and flourished? (Chapter 6). Finally, the findings will be summarised and concluded in Chapter 7.

5 A Juxtaposition of Urban Social Movements

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the two case studies that have been selected for this research, namely, the urban social movements 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. It will answer the following question: What are the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements? In order to do so, the theoretical framework of dWUNC by Wouters and Walgrave (2017), discussed in Chapter 3, will be utilised.

Chapter 5 is divided into three parts. Firstly, this chapter will provide background information about the selected urban movements, which will be respectively followed by an analysis employing the dWUNC framework. Here, semi-structured interviews will primarily be used to illustrate the different components in the movements. Thereafter, the two urban movements will be compared. Finally, a conclusion will be given regarding the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements.

5.2 The Case of 'Defend Vake Park'

5.2.1 Introduction to Vake Park

Vake Park is Tbilisi's largest public park, which was opened in 1946. The park is located in the district of Vake, at the western end of Chavchavadze Avenue. It is listed as the city's cultural heritage, and a classic example of Soviet landscape architecture from its era. For over two decades, significant parts of historical public spaces of the park have been privatised. The privatisation of Vake Park started in 2002, and in 2012 only two-thirds of the park was available to the public (Zhvania 2020: 396-7). While the park was designated as a Recreational Zone 2, which typically prohibits construction activities, a provision exists that allows the city's mayor to grant exceptions for specific construction projects. In July 2013, then-mayor Gigi Ugulava of the UNM party authorised the construction of the seven-story Hotel Budapest on this specific site (Tsintsabadze 2019a). According to the prevailing media narrative,

the exception was believed to be influenced by the close connection between the owner of the construction company and the UNM government, as well as the fact that the owner was a close relative of Ugulava (Tsuladze et al. 2018: 329).

In September 2013, Tbilisi Architecture Service approved an architectural project proposed by Graali LLC, and a permit was subsequently issued (Studio Monitor 2015). When the public learnt about the planned rehabilitation of Vake Park, a grassroots citizens' movement emerged in response. As information spread quickly through the Internet, it became evident that the construction of Budapest Hotel would progress without any meaningful participation of the public. Although sporadic protests had been observed against the hotel construction, it was not until January 2014 that these protests started to organise systematically and had a significant level of participants. In this context, an online petition and Facebook group ('Save Vake Park') were established. Representatives from green NGOs, activists, and concerned Tbilisians met regularly in Vake Park to express their opposition against the construction of the hotel (ibid.). The tactics that were utilised during 'Defend Vake Park' were unprecedented, such as the initiative of *Guerilla Gardening* to build a permanent tent in the park. The idea to guard the construction site against any secret ways of resuming construction by occupying it 24/7 was followed by many others (DFWatch 2014).

Alongside the physical gatherings of the protestors against Hotel Budapest, NGOs and involved activists also issued a complaint letter to the city government demanding them to 'ban illegal construction in a recreational zone' (The Messenger Online 2014) and calling for more aggressive efforts to safeguard Vake Park' (Tsuladze et al. 2018: 329). Notably, Georgia's cultural elite supported the protests and initiated an online campaign to voice their concerns. In spite of this broad engagement, representatives of the City Hall and other relevant organisations remained silent and the construction company, Tiflis Business Group, continued to cut down trees (Tsuladze et al. 2018: 329). In a turn of events, the Vake Park protests became significantly stronger following the appointment of Davit Narmania as the city mayor by the new government, GD. In Narmania's pre-election speech, the mayoral candidate condemned the hotel construction in Vake Park and confirmed that he would never have issued a construction permit for this site if he had been a

mayor earlier. In addition, he promised that such areas would be transformed into recreational zones (ibid.).

After the election of Narmania as Tbilisi's mayor, however, he adopted a more nuanced stance towards the hotel construction. Although Narmania recognised the construction as a critical issue, the new mayor claimed that he could not do anything to prevent it due to the protection of private property rights. Nevertheless, following intense debates and ongoing demonstrations, the project was ultimately banned. The ban triggered an open confrontation between the City Hall and Tiflis Business Group: the investor accused the City Hall of causing unjust financial losses through the prolonging of the investigation process and demanded compensation amounting to 11 million USD - a year's worth of profit. In March 2016, the city government deprived the permit that had been issued by the UNM authorities and offered the investment company a different location for the construction of the hotel (ibid.). Subsequently, the matter was pursued in the Court of Appeals, which reversed the City Court's decision in favour of the investor in 2018. However, it became known that the construction permit had already expired in 2016, suspending the court decision (Zhvania 2020: 399).

Following the ruling of the Court of Appeals, Kakha Kaladze, Tbilisi's mayor since 2017, became an unexpected supporter of the Vake Park case. Even though the GD member was elected long after the protests, he expressed his disapproval of the hotel construction in the park and promised to stop it. The mayor organised different meetings with civil society representatives, and personally negotiated an agreement that involved the relocation of the construction to an alternative location (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 89). Therefore, one could argue that the Vake Park protests were not fully victorious since the investor could construct the hotel on another site. As urban activist Anano Tsintsabadze argues, 'while we celebrate the victory [over Vake Park], we have to be clear that saving one park is not a victory, victory will be making systemic changes in city politics' (Tsintsabadze 2019b). Furthermore, the mayor's support shows the hypocrisy of Georgian politics regarding urban development projects: while advocating for the protection of Vake Park, the city government effectively aligned themselves with capital interests, disregarding civic mobilisation and discontent (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 89-90).

5.2.2 Participants' Reflections: Worthiness

As the previous section illustrated, the urban movement 'Defend Vake Park' was supported by various individuals, groups and NGOs. However, the worthiness (or: behaviour) of the involved activists is inextricably connected to the tactics and methods of grassroots organisation *Guerilla Gardening* and, more specifically, to Nata Peradze. The dedication and persistence of Peradze, who is the founding member and leader of *Guerilla Gardening*, were undeniable in the case of preserving Vake Park. Under her leadership, the movement gained widespread attention on both local and international levels (Lomsadze 2014; Nair 2018). While Peradze was on the forefront of the protests, the interviews indicate she remains to be a controversial figure: while some respondents (Interview 2 2023) praised Peradze's role as a leader of the Vake Park movements, others (Interview 3 2023) mentioned that her behaviour discredited the wider urban movement. For example, respondent 4 described that Peradze was framed to be 'rude' and a 'show-off', which resulted into the movement becoming personalised to a certain extent; as the media and the public focused more on Peradze's actions and persona, attention was being drawn away from the broader cause (Interview 4 2023).

Besides the attitudes of leading figures in the Vake Park case, worthiness can also be understood by the way that certain tools were utilised by the participants. Notably, Peradze and other activists made extensive use of social media. One of the most important platforms for communication was the Facebook page *Guerilla Gardening*. The page of the grassroots organisation proclaims that: 'We are not an organisation [...] but rather operate through this Facebook page which unites free and united citizens who use this social network to organise future events [...] All our events are advertised on the wall of this group and anyone who would like to join, can easily join and participate. We are all equal, there is no place for bossing and leadership here' (About [Guerrilla gardening Tbilisi]: n.d.). Besides the use of Facebook, other social media channels were also used during the Vake Park protests. One of the respondents talked about the importance of Twitter, explaining that 'via Twitter, we informed each other very quickly. One could receive a signal, and when you got the signal, you had to run to the Vake Park. Because we knew that [in that moment] somebody [the police] would come by car. And it was very effective.' Moreover, the

interviewee mentioned that Twitter 'brought people together very quickly and it helped' (Interview 4 2023).

The behaviour of protestors against the Hotel Budapest can be also reflected by the specific strategies and tactics that the individuals engaged in. One of the respondents explained that even though the protests were spontaneous at first, later, 'they [participants in Vake Park protests] had a clear strategy. […] Maybe it was not written, but they had their rules and their beliefs' (Interview 2 2023). The participants drew inspiration from the global Occupy Movement, set up permanent camps and stayed in tents to prevent the procedure of the hotel construction. Consequently, the park transformed into a space of community engagement and hosted many concerts, performances, and public gatherings (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 89). The friendly atmosphere of the protests attracted many people beyond the more common participants of 'Defend Vake Park'. There were also activities held outside of the park, specifically targeted towards the City Hall. Interviewee 4 (2023) talked about the protest action 'Picnic at the City Hall', during which various activists gathered with a placard saying 'A hotel in the park? Picnic in the city hall!'. As the participant explained, the idea behind it was that 'if you want to kick us out of the park, we would like to kick you out of […] your working space.' The tactic was considered 'surprising' and a contrast with the so-called 'bureaucratic people' working there (ibid.). In the context of strategies and tactics during 'Defend Vake Park', another respondent confirmed that: 'it didn't have to involve fancy tactics and it didn't have to involve public campaigning [to be successful]' (Interview 8 2023).

5.2.3 Participants' Reflections: Unity

When examining the aspect of unity in the case of 'Defend Vake Park', it becomes evident that the agreement and alignment among different participants was not a straightforward process. Respondent 9 (2023) reflected on these challenges, and explained that: 'it wasn't easy because […] there were too many people, […] but somehow, we managed to communicate. We also had some problems because of that; there were some misunderstandings and some divisions. We were getting more divided than united. And then divided and united again. But yeah, that's part of the process, it was some kind of a living organism: transforming and evolving.'

Furthermore, respondent 7 (2023) pointed out that a strength of the Vake Park protests was that different groups that typically not cooperate forged surprising alliances in their shared goal to preserve the park from the hotel construction. The protests brought together a mix of environmental activists, leftist activist groups, right-leaning activist groups, liberal-oriented groups, and socially oriented groups. As the interviewee claimed, 'we were not that angry with each other at that moment so we could keep our unity and I think that this unity is what saved the park from the hotel at the end of the day' (ibid.). Thus, despite the challenges that participants faced to unify, the diverse group still managed to find a common ground to achieve the stated goals of the movement.

5.2.4 Participants' Reflections: Numbers

Throughout the six-year battle to save Vake Park, the number of individuals participating in protest actions depended on the specific moments of the movement's timeline, as well as the location of the demonstrations. For example, in the early stages of the protest, *Guerilla Gardening* and its supporters organised a gathering at the City Hall that ended up in a turnout lower than hoped for. The protest was fuelled by frustration over a meeting between activists and representatives of the Mayor's Office and City Council, which had been repeatedly postponed and allowed only a limited number of activists to participate. When the protests were announced in December 2013, it gained strong public support on social media. However, contrary to expectations, only 100 individuals showed up at the protest. Still, as the action was taking place, discussions were held concerning future strategic measures. Here, a petition was presented that was signed by more than 8,000 people (Tsintsabadze 2019a).

As the protests continued, activists started to effectively use social media technologies to mobilise people in a faster and more organised way. In particular, Twitter particularly proved to be an effective platform to gather a high number of individuals: whenever the police would come and try to let construction workers in by removing roadblocks, *Guerilla Gardening* would Tweet a message that around 300 people would receive by SMS (France 24 2014). The Facebook group of *Guerilla Gardening* itself, followed by 14.000 users, was also an important platform of

communication. Even though not all of them came out to the protests, Nata Peradze stated that there were more than 1.000 people at their biggest gathering (Israelyan 2014). Moreover, in addition to the specific moment during the protest, the location is also an important factor in understanding the level of participation. During the protest camp, for instance, hundreds of people would regularly gather in the park: 'some people come and stay for a couple of hours, others spend days in the park' (DFWatch 2014).

5.2.5 Participants' Reflections: Commitment

The commitment of participants involved in urban activism in Tbilisi are primarily driven by a professional interest in urban development issues and the belief that the development of Tbilisi's urban space is heading in the wrong direction (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 91). In the case of Vake Park, however, the level of commitment was even higher due to the strong sentimental connection that protesters have to the park. Indeed, the fight to protect Vake Park was not only an ecological question; it was also an emotional one. For example, when one of the respondents was asked whether the main motivation to join the protests was ecological, the answer was: 'no, it was not. [Of course,] it was also ecological, but it is our city. I was born in Tbilisi; my parents and their parents were born here. So, we will help this city. [...] Everyone who lives in Tbilisi and was born here knows Vake Park. [...] So of course we will fight for our city to save it' (Interview 5 2023). In a similar vein, interviewee 7 (2023) pointed out that 'Vake Park was kind of an emotional place for different generations of Tbilisians: youngsters, but also the older persons, who would have a romantic attachment or the valuable times of their life in this public space. So, we all got together to fight the government who wanted to build the Hotel Budapest in the Vake Park.'

Some respondents stressed that the commitment of 'Defend Vake Park' was connected to the leadership of Nata Peradze; interviewee 2 (2023) claimed that any urban movement needs a real leader and confirmed that 'she [Nata Peradze] was the main driver of this movement'. Other respondents, however, claimed that the prominence of Nata Peradze worked counterproductive since she got framed in a negative way and the cause became personalised (Interview 4 2023). As the interviewee explained: 'a lot of friends of mine were very critical and told me why I

was standing with this person [Nata Peradze]' (ibid.). Furthermore, the participants' commitment can further be illustrated by the type of tactics they engaged in. The fact that protestors were occupying the site 24/7 where the hotel was planned to be built in order to prevent heavy equipment and trucks from entering demonstrated a high commitment to the cause. Respondent 7 (2023) described that 'they [the participants] were sleeping in the tents and physically protecting the hotel from being built'. The timespan of the physical occupation further reflects the high commitment of the protesters. One of the interviewees recalled that '[the] Vake Park [protests] were quite long. We were living for one and a half years in the park. [...] We had a camp, and we were guarding the park during the night because they [investor company] realised that we held the protest during the day. And then they continued the construction during the night. So, then we started to guard the park every night and we [even] created a schedule' (Interview 9 2023).

5.2.6 Participants' Reflections: Diversity

The 'Defend Vake Park' movement demonstrated remarkable diversity among its participants in terms of age and gender: the interviewees ranged from 20 up to 70, with both women and men being involved. Furthermore, the protests in Vake Park brought together groups and individuals with diverse ideologies and political orientations. While *Guerilla Gardening* remained politically neutral, other organisations, including *Green Fist*, identified themselves as left-wing. Along with activist organisations and individuals, nationalist and conservative groups also protested against the hotel construction in Vake Park (Tsintsabadze 2019a). One of the interviewees confirmed the perceived diversity of the Vake Park protests. As respondent 9 (2023) mentioned: 'there were so many different kinds of people, with different backgrounds, different characteristics, and different interests. It was a really nice example [...] of self-organisation because we did not have any kind of system before. We created this system by ourselves and discussed every question and every idea together'.

While the protesters in the Vake Park case showed diversity in certain aspects, activists in Tbilisi are less diverse when it comes to education, place of living and social class. Typically, they possess university degrees and are mostly engaged in

intellectual professions such as architecture, cultural heritage preservation, geography and urban studies. They live mostly in the central parts of the city, and have the time and resources to attend protests. Therefore, urban activists in Tbilisi are considered to come from relatively privileged social backgrounds (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 91). One of the interviewees confirmed the notion that one needs time and resources to go out and protest: 'it [protesting] requires lots of time and I just don't have enough time. Of course, personally, I was with them - but unfortunately, physically, I did not have so much time' (Interview 2 2023). Furthermore, another participant (Interview 10 2023) highlighted the problem of narrow-mindedness among some protesters of 'Defend Vake Park'. The respondent gave the example that 'some leaders were talking about the problems around the centre of Tbilisi. We were telling them to join us in other protests. […] One of them said that my patriotism starts in Bazaleti Street and finishes in Vake Park' (ibid.). Hence, even though participants were generally motivated in urban activism to improve Tbilisi's urban development, some still exhibited behaviour of 'not in my backyard'.

To attract a wider audience to the Vake Park protests, festive activities were organised inspired by the 'Gudiashvili Square model' (Berikishvili and Sichinava 2018: 5). This model refers to the creative tactics utilised during the large-scale protests to defend Gudiashvili Square, which included concerts, exhibitions and performances. Interviewee 3 (2023) recalled the atmosphere during the protests in Vake Park, and described that 'during the day, it was very colourful and it became [like] a festival'. Another respondent (Interview 4 2023) added that 'we also had some hot soups and tea for the people who stayed there. Many more people were involved than ever before. […] We had a huge spring event organised for children. It was really nice because there was music and somehow it really had a festive character.' On the one hand, this festive character of the protest attracted different kinds of people, thereby strengthening diversity. On the other hand, it became a weakness of the protests since 'people did not go here for specific political will to do something against people [in power]' (Interview 3 2023).

5.3 The Case of 'No to Panorama!'

5.3.1 Introduction to Panorama Tbilisi

In March 2014, the Georgia Co-Investment Fund announced the 'Panorama Tbilisi Project': a project that has been estimated to encompass an area of 270,000 square metres and to be worth approximately 500 million USD. The controversial megaproject claimed to be the largest real estate venture in the history of Georgia. Panorama Tbilisi aims to connect four multifunctional centres (i.e. Freedom Square, Erekle II Square, Sololaki Hills, Sololaki Rise) through a complex network of roads, ropeways and inclined elevators. Being situated in the historic or natural landscape preservation zones of Tbilisi, the project embraces the very heart of the centre all the way up to the Sololaki mountain (Anderson 2014). It includes an exclusive business centre featuring offices, conference halls, leisure centres, a seven-star hotel and a golf course. According to the project promoters, the primary objective of the project is to strengthen the burgeoning tourism industry in Georgia. In addition, they promised to employ 2000 workers and create 1000 permanent jobs after finishing the project (Tsuladze et al. 2018: 329-30). The Panorama Project is considered to be a 'one-man's-project', belonging to Georgia's richest man and former prime minister, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who personally committed 1 billion USD to the fund (Gogishvili 2023: 9).

Following the announcement by Georgia Co-Investment Fund, concerns were voiced by local activists, professionals, and opposition parties. These groups particularly worried about the hidden agenda of the Fund, since a significant part of the project's details remained concealed (ibid: 2). As the lack of project details persisted without any further information provided, the City Hall officially denied the construction permit of the project. As a response, the Co-Investment Fund released 'eight photos, six digital images, and five maps demarcating the land boundaries' (Tsuladze et al. 2018: 330). However, despite these efforts, the City Hall's Regulatory Committee for Territory Urbanization and Utilisation Issues concluded that the provided documents are insufficient for the project's approval (Anderson 2014). At the same time, several legislative amendments were undertaken, including a change in the law regarding normative acts for authorising construction permits. This led to the

possibility of projects to be considered having 'state importance', meaning they can be allowed to start construction without having the required documents. Moreover, certain adjustments were made to the City Development Plan for Tbilisi in December 2014, resulting in a relaxation of restrictions for initiating new projects. As a result, newly designated zones received comparatively lesser levels of protection than before (Tsuladze et al. 2018: 330).

Against this background, activists and green NGOs started to mobilise themselves and engage in activist activities: 24 NGOs united under a new movement called 'Together' (Tsuladze 2021: 47). Besides the lack of transparency of the Georgia Co-Investment Fund's plans and public procurement, critics were also frustrated about the privatisation of public assets, the potential destructive effects on the city's cultural and natural heritage and the neglect of the local tourism industry's needs (Lorusso 2018). Consequently, different platforms were established to voice critics' concerns, such as a Facebook page called 'Together PaNOrama.' Furthermore, various protests were organised, among which one in front of the City Hall on 29 December 2014. A remarkable symbol of the protest against Panorama Tbilisi became a photo from a bird's eye view in which various activists are standing next to each other to form a symbol of 'SOS' (DFWatch 2015a). In June-July 2015, the protests increased when it became evident that activists and NGOs had been excluded from the public administrative process, and the government approved the permit for the project in secret. As reported by Tbilisi-based newspaper Democracy and Freedom Watch, locals gathered in the old town and held banners with 'NO to Panorama, the city is ours!' (DFWatch 2015b).

It is no surprise that the development of 'Panorama Tbilisi' has been strongly connected to Georgia's political landscape. The project was staged during a two-year period that involved critical political changes in Georgia across various levels. The 2012 parliamentary elections led to the loss of the UNM as the ruling party of Georgia, paving the way for GD to take power. As a consequence, a new government was formed by Ivasnivhili. The success of the new ruling party continued during the presidential elections in 2013 (Tsuladze et al. 2018: 329). The pivotal moment of change, however, occurred during the local elections in June 2014. Here, Davit Narmania, a candidate from the GD party openly supporting 'Panorama Tbilisi',

emerged victorious in the second round of mayoral elections. As the ruling coalition managed to win a majority in the Tbilisi City Council too, an opportunity for the Fund was provided to advocate for regulatory changes in the project's master plan. At the same time, Ivanishvili even claimed that if he did not persist on the project, no investor would have been able to handle it. Any kind of critique on Panorama Tbilisi would be framed by GD, and especially by Ivanishvili, as part of UNM's position (ibid.: 331). The implementation of 'Panorama Tbilisi' exemplifies how certain procedures, regulations or laws at any level of government can be overlooked and adjusted according to the interests and wishes of those in power - in particular, those of Ivanishvili. While legislation was changed to allow the construction to continue, expert opinions on both local and international levels have been ignored (Tsuladze 2021: 48).

5.3.2 Participants' Reflections: Worthiness

The worthiness (or: behaviour) of the activists that fought against Panorama Tbilisi was well described by respondent 7: '[The] Panorama [project] was not as radically protested. […] It was not an unstoppable protest. We would come out on one protest and then go home. We tried to fight more either in the council meetings or in court' (Interview 7 2023). Several green NGOs, such as *Tiflis Hamkari* and *Green Alternative*, alongside activist groups like *Guerilla Gardening Tbilisi* and *Green Fist* took the lead in organising regular protest campaigns against the development projects and its environmental consequences, such as the displacement of large trees. During these campaigns both conventional and unconventional methods were used to voice their concerns; while conventional forms of participation included the submission of official letters to the City Hall, unconventional ones were focused on different protest actions. These protest actions include many that had been unseen in Georgia before, such as throwing peas at the City Hall's walls (Tsuladze 2021: 44-5). Sometimes, such unconventional actions led to the arrests and fines of many activists based on charges of hooliganism, insubordination and the use of offensive language. Among those arrested was Aleko Elisashvili, who was a member of the City Assembly at the time (ibid: 47-8).

5.3.3 Participants' Reflections: Unity

The individuals that participated in 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' faced significant difficulties in terms of the unification of different groups. As one of the respondents mentioned, 'we [protesters against 'Panorama Tbilisi'] had a long preparation period because we tried to bring 24 groups together under the 'Together' movement' (Interview 4 2023). Another interviewee elaborated on the division during the Panorama protests and explained that 'we had two main groups. One of the groups [liberally oriented] said we should only protest the demolition of old houses. And then we had the other group [socially oriented] saying, no, we need to broadly state that the Panorama Project is the large capital that interferes with the normal life of people. […] We would come together, and these two groups would kind of blame each other; more socially oriented groups would say, you are only talking about buildings and you are not interested in people living inside of them. The more liberally oriented groups would say, we need to save the face of Tbilisi; cultural heritage is really important. In the end, they also debated on […] the banners that they had or the flags that they had. So, there was absolutely no compromise' (Interview 7 2023). As the groups in question held different ideologies, it became almost impossible to unify for the common cause.

Despite these challenges, some activists attempted to find common groups among the diverse groups by employing different tactics. For example, one of the respondents attempted at building bridges between the groups through a civil court case. The interviewee explained that 'we applied for a lawsuit and the applicants were all sorts of different people: individual activists, but also very respected NGOs like *Green Alternative*, *EMC* and *Tiflis Hamkari*. […] But because the court case was not successful, this glimpse of hope was lost of any unity that could happen within the Panorama protests' (Interview 7 2023). Another respondent explained that the inability of unification was embedded in a wider development in Georgia. According to the interviewee, 'people often think in layers of society [here]. The interests of that certain class are more important than their own personal and individual interests. […] Here, one cannot cooperate with a group that one does not 'belong' too. Let's call it groupism' (Interview 3 2023). The participant gives the example of the aforementioned Nata Peradze, who 'could not work together with 'leftists' because

she associated them with the Soviet past' (ibid.) Respondent 10 summarises the multifaceted challenges of unifying during 'No to Panorama!', by arguing that 'the result of theoretical, practical, personal as well as many other problems was that we were not able to unify; we were not able to have a theoretical consensus, and we were not able to be friendly with each other because of this' (Interview 10 2023).

5.3.4 Participants' Reflections: Numbers

The number of participants against Panorama Tbilisi was expected to be high, as the project united all urban activist groups under the umbrella movement 'Together' (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 94). However, the urban megaproject had locations in various places throughout the city, which posed challenges for the protesters to gather and mobilise. According to interviewee 8 (2023), the scattered sites of the project 'impacted the efficiency of the protests.' The respondent explained that 'it was a bit confusing where to gather people [to protest] and where to move towards' (ibid.). The complications of the project's locations were confirmed by respondent 6, who explained that 'this was in the hills. So, in terms of the place, it was difficult to reach without a car.' However, Panorama Tbilisi also includes more central places; 'The major gathering was on Pushkin Square [...], one of Panorama's key locations' (Interview 8 2023). Still, 'in size, the crowd was not that big' (ibid.). The small size of the protests was confirmed by respondent 4, who described that 'we started with 500 people, but afterwards [...], we had less and less [people showing up]. And then we were only [left with] 20 [participants].' Among the seven protest actions against Panorama's construction, 'the biggest group was around 600 people; that was the biggest event' (Interview 4 2023).

Another respondent explains the low involvement of the public in 'No to Panorama!' due to the political nature of the Panorama Project; the protests were considered to be 'against Ivanishvili' (Interview 9 2023). For the same reason, as argued by interviewee 7 (2023), local inhabitants of Rustaveli 1 did not join the protesters despite being directly affected by the project's construction. As the participant explained, 'I think they were scared of this [...] really big power opposing them, and it's really scary if you think about the big political power, big financial power' (ibid.). Finally, respondent 8 (2023) concluded that '[the] Panorama [project] is basically a

political project. It's beyond this urban planning dimension. […] It's one of the good examples of how the private capital is used as a tool to control the whole space and society and everything around it'. Thus, alongside the strength of different organisations coming together against the project, Panorama Tbilisi simultaneously exposed the vulnerabilities of urban activism in Tbilisi due to the substantial power of big capital, intertwined with political elites (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 94).

5.3.5 Participants' Reflections: Commitment

Individuals that mobilised themselves against Ivanishvili's project were generally motivated by a combination of professional interest in urban development matters and a deep concern about the trajectory of Tbilisi's urban development (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 91). Over the course of seven protests, the commitment was relatively low during the protest against Panorama Tbilisi due to the political context of Georgia, as well as the inability to unite different activist groups under the 'Together' movement. As interviewee 9 (2023) explained, 'people had mixed feelings about it.' While for some, the Panorama project was considered a 'monster in town' or a 'pharaonic real estate project' (Lorusso 2018), for others, 'it [Panorama project] meant development for the city' (Interview 9 2023). According to respondent 8, the ambivalent stance of Georgians was connected to the political landscape that Panorama Tbilisi was connected to; Ivanishvili's party, GD, 'had this huge rate of approval. So, I think that was also a big factor that people would think that this guy would not do a bad thing to us. […] [Here,] there is this attitude that when you have a big resource coming in the centre, they [Georgians] look at it as an opportunity to create more jobs' (Interview 8 2023). Interviewee 1 went further by expressing that 'it's about power and no one could do anything about it. Even if the whole country was protesting, nobody could have stopped it' (Interview 1 2023). In addition to challenges related to Georgia's political climate, commitment during 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' was also low because of the short-lived unification of 24 urban movements under 'Together'. As respondent 9 (2023) argued, the umbrella organisation did not last long 'because of diverse viewpoints.'

5.3.6 Participants' Reflections: Diversity

The 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' movement showed relatively little diversity during the protests against Panorama Tbilisi. Apart from the fact that both men and women were involved, interviewee 8 (2023) claimed that '[the protestors] were basically young people and [...] students.' Respondent 7 (2023) added that the Panorama protesters consisted of 'a smaller group of the activists who just loved the old city and who thought that [the] Panorama [project] would be ecologically a disaster for the city'. Interviewee 8 (2023) described that the lack of diversity is 'one of the characteristics of urban activism in Tbilisi,' and even spoke of 'a sense of elitism'. The respondent elaborated on this phenomenon by explaining that 'you have this group of citizens who are concerned about air pollution or concerned about the disappearance of green spaces. [...] It should be concerning for every citizen, but in the end, you just get these students or researchers. [...] People, who are not engaged in any activism or any public activities, they wouldn't just go out and protest' (ibid.). The aforementioned interviewees confirm the point of earlier studies on urban protest in Tbilisi, which argues that activists of Georgia's capital generally tend to be similar in terms of education, place of residence, and social class (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 91).

Reflecting on the participants in the Panorama protests, one interviewee acknowledges that 'we also failed to involve the local population in this [Panorama protests], [such as] the population who resided in the old city, and also the population who lived adjacent to the Panorama building. They actually had their own legal protest, not the activist protest' (Interview 7 2023). One reason why the local population was not involved in the protests was because their main concern was related to the devaluation of their property. Even though they went to court to fight for their property rights, 'they did not want to connect with us [protesters].' As a result, 'the Panorama [protests] were dismantled into totally different small groups. One was fighting for their property rights; others were fighting for the city' (ibid.). Another respondent mentioned that the government was partly responsible for this division: 'the government under Ivanishvili tried to show the people that they will create new job positions because money will enter this district. [...] So they tried to create a conflict between the people who live in old Tbilisi [...] and us' (Interview 10

2023). Thus, as the participants of 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' and local people affected by the project's construction did not cooperate, the diversity of the movement's participants remained to be relatively low.

5.4 Juxtaposing Urban Social Movements

In the previous sections, the urban social movements 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' were introduced and analysed according to the theoretical framework dWUNC (Wouters and Walgrave 2017). Even though both movements had similar actors involved, and partly took place over the same period of time, they developed in a different way. This section will juxtapose the two movements in order to answer the first sub-question of this thesis: What are the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements? By comparing the two movements according to the elements of dWUNC, valuable conclusions can be drawn related to the ways 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' are similar and/or differ from one another.

5.4.1 Juxtaposing Worthiness

Although the people that were involved in 'Defend Vake Park' and 'Panorama Tbilisi' were mostly similar, the worthiness observed during the two urban movements differed. One of the activists, who was part of both movements, explained that the protests against Panorama Tbilisi were not as radically protested compared to the case of Vake Park: 'we didn't sleep at night in the tents; it was not an unstoppable protest. We would come out on one protest and then go home. We tried to fight more either in the council meetings or in the courts as well, whereas Vake Park was a simultaneous, persistent, unstoppable technique of protest' (Interview 7 2023). While the style of protest differed between the two movements, the authorities reacted similarly (Dundua et al. 2022b: 27). However, a crucial difference between the two is the fact that GD came to power during the Vake Park protests in 2012, which provided a window of opportunity. This change of government allowed for a context to emerge in which authorities cooperated with the movement's organisations to find a solution for the protesters' demands. During this process, the

investor of Hotel Budapest also communicated with both sides. In contrast, during the Panorama protests, neither the government nor the investors showed hardly any willingness to cooperate or communicate with civil society actors. The only exception was the presence of several activists during meetings at the City Assembly, facilitated by its opposition members (Dundua et al. 2022b: 28-9).

5.4.2 Juxtaposing Unity

While comparing the degree of unity among the protesters against the hotel construction in Vake Park and the Panorama project, it becomes clear that the participants of 'Defend Vake Park' were more united than during 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. One of the respondents juxtaposed the experiences in unity during the two movements by describing: 'when I look at the pictures of the Vake Park at the moment, I see those people standing together who don't stand each other, [...] who don't talk and who have a political fight against different opinions at the moment. [...] [They] were never able to unite during the Panorama case' (Interview 7 2023). According to the interviewee, the difference in unity can be explained as 'some of the people who agreed on unification during the Vake Park case thought that they had kind of given up their main interest and ideas for the sake of unity, for the sake of Vake park. So, whenever this unity was requested from them the second time [during the Panorama Protests], they said, we are not compromising our interest this time' (ibid.). To show the public what the different groups believed in, their approach shifted from compromising during the Vake Park protests to firmly stating their positions in case of the Panorama ones. Respondent 7 further explained that protestors felt the necessity to be 'persistent on our principles this time because [...] we failed to do it in the Vake Park case.' Hence, 'we should state the messages that we deem right, and we should bring the flags that we deem right.' Finally, the participant concluded that the inability for protestors to unite during the case of 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' was the reason why the movement failed to reach its goals (ibid.).

5.4.3 Juxtaposing Numbers

In both cases of 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', it is hard to estimate the exact number of citizens participating in the urban movements since sources confirming this information are lacking. However, different respondents

confirmed that the protests against the hotel construction in Vake Park were significantly bigger than those against the Panorama Project. There were three reasons why more people decided to go out on the streets in the case of Vake Park compared to Ivanishvili's project. Firstly, the specific locations of the public space that was to be defended is a key determinant here. Respondents 6 and 8 pointed out that the scattered locations of the 'Panorama Tbilisi' negatively impacted the protest's outcome. It was both confusing where to gather and head to and the locations of the megaproject were hard to reach since some of them were in the hills (Interview 6 2023; Interview 8 2023). In contrast, 'Vake Park was in the heart of the city. It was very visible' (Interview 6 2023).

Secondly, the higher number of protesters during 'Defend Vake Park' compared to 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' can be explained by the fact that the former movement was considered to be more politically neutral compared to the latter. Respondent 9 (2023) confirmed that 'people understood that [the] Vake Park [protests] were not against the party while Panorama was against Ivanishvili, so that's why not many people got involved. Maybe because of fear, maybe because of the previous government.' The participant further explained that 'when the Vake park case started, there was still the mayor of the previous government [UNM].' As the protests went on, the government changed with GD as the ruling party, 'so it was [politically] kind of a more neutral situation. Like, [it was] not directed to someone' (ibid.). Thirdly, the type of activities organised during the Vake Park protesters attracted many people that would normally not engage in urban movements; they were creative, fun and often non-political based on the 'Gudiashvili Square model' (Berikishvili and Sichinava 2018: 5). However, the non-political character of such activities came with its criticism. For example, respondent 3 (2023) expressed his scepticism about people showing up without any political will to challenge power structures. In contrast, it was more difficult to gather people besides the regular protesters during the 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' movement. Even local inhabitants of Rustaveli, who were mostly affected by one of the project's buildings, refused to join the protests due to the project's political nature (Interview 7 2023).

5.4.4 Juxtaposing Commitment

The commitment during the protest actions during the Vake Park preservation movement was arguably higher than during the demonstrations against Panorama Tbilisi. While during the Vake Park protests, activists were camping in the park for one and a half years to occupy the construction site (Interview 9 2023), the Panorama protests only saw seven protests with gradually less people showing up (Interview 4 2023). Even though the activists involved were equally motivated due to reasons of professional interest and concern for Tbilisi's urban development (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 91), there are three reasons why there was more persistence during 'Defend Vake Park' compared to 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. Firstly, different respondents pointed out that generations of Tbilisians feel emotionally attached to Vake Park (Interview 5 2023; Interview 7 2023; Interview 9 2023). Respondent 5 (2023) even stressed that the involvement of people in the fight against the construction of Hotel Budapest was self-evident. This was different in the case of protests against Panorama Tbilisi, towards which people had more ambivalent feelings. Some interviewees emphasised the efficient role that the government's propaganda played, which claimed that Panorama Tbilisi would mean development for the city, creating jobs and other opportunities (Dundua et al. 2022b: 32; Interview 8 2023; Interview 9 2023). Moreover, one participant explained that the conflicting stance towards Panorama Tbilisi was connected to the high rate of approval of GD at the time (Interview 8 2023).

Secondly, the varying levels of commitment during the two urban movements depended on the strength of leadership. One of the respondents claimed that 'all teams need a real leader and Nata [Peradze] was that one' (Interview 2 2023). In contrast, during the Panorama protests, there was not one single leader. Alongside the lack of a leading figure, 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' also faced problems in terms of organisation as umbrella movement 'Together' did not manage to endure due to disagreements among the participants (Interview 8 2023). Finally, commitment in the cases of Vake Park and Panorama Tbilisi varied as different degrees of stakeholders were involved. During the 'Defend Vake Park' movement, 'all of the activist groups were involved. They were communicating with professional groups, like architects, who were trying to prepare the argumentation for them. They were

trying to communicate with the politicians as well, because politicians [...] also have these sentiments towards Vake Park' (Interview 7 2023). During the Panorama protests, a smaller group of activists was involved, who primarily focused on the destructive ecological aspect of the implementation of Panorama Tbilisi. As there was less of a sentiment towards the project among the wider population, the degree of cooperation with other stakeholders was lower than in Vake Park (ibid.).

5.4.5 Juxtaposing Diversity

Both urban movements 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi' displayed diversity in some respects, while in others they did not. However, the participants in Vake Park were still more diverse age-wise, arguably due to the emotional attachment to the park across different generations (Interview 7 2023). In contrast, during the Panorama protests mostly young people and students were involved (Interview 8 2023). The lack of diversity, as argued by respondent 8, leads to 'a sense of elitism' and is considered to be a characteristic of urban activism in Tbilisi (ibid.). The activist explained that only a small segment of society is concerned about issues such as air pollution and the loss of green spaces. As the wider population don't share the same concerns, they would not participate in urban protests; they consider such problems not to be directly relevant to their lives (ibid.). Earlier studies on urban activism in Tbilisi have confirmed that activists in the capital tend to be highly educated, live in central parts of the city and come from more privileged social backgrounds. This community often hold university degrees and are involved in intellectual professions including architecture, cultural heritage preservation, geography and urban studies (Rekhviashvili et al. 2020: 91). Moreover, these are often the people that have the time and financial resources to participate in protests (Interview 2 2023).

Despite the relatively privileged backgrounds of urban activists in Tbilisi, Vake Park still managed to attract people to their protests which do not belong to the regular protesters of Georgia's capital. This development was mostly connected to the creative use of tactics according to the 'Gudiashvili Square Model' (Berikishvili and Sichinava 2018: 5). As the park was transformed into a community engagement space, different concerts, performances, and public gatherings were organised under

a friendly atmosphere. While this festive approach allowed a wide range of people to attend the protests, some activists acknowledged its downsides. For example, criticism was voiced about the fact that people attended the activities without the awareness of politics (Interview 3 2023). During the Panorama protests, protesters failed to involve local inhabitants that resided near the project's locations in their protest actions. The reason for the inability to unite the two groups was the difference in concerns: whereas the activists were mainly worried about issues related to ecology, the local population were focused on the devaluation of their property (Interview 10 2023). Consequently, the protests against Panorama Tbilisi fragmented into distinct, smaller groups and failed to represent a coherent, diverse group.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduced two case studies that were selected for this research, namely, the urban social movements 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. Chapter 3 started off with providing background information about the selected urban movements, which was respectively followed by an analysis employing the dWUNC-framework (Wouters and Walgrave 2017). Thereafter, the two urban movements were juxtaposed. In this section, a conclusion will be given that answers the sub-question of this chapter: What are the main similarities and differences between the two selected urban social movements?

The main similarities between the urban movements aimed against 'Hotel Budapest' and the Panorama project are found within the component diversity. In both movements, the main actors were more or less the same people. These individuals often possess higher levels of education, reside in central areas of the city and have more socially privileged backgrounds. Beyond the core participants, however, more diversity was observed during the 'Defend Vake Park' protests compared to 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' ones. This participation of a more diverse crowd in the former movement stems primarily from the emotional attachment different generations of Tbilisians have to the park, as well as from the festive activities that were organised.

The main differences can be explained by the components: worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. The worthiness of participants of the Vake Park protests were reflected by a more dedicated and persistent approach, while innovative tactics (e.g. occupation of physical space) and tools were utilised (e.g. Twitter). In contrast, the Panorama protests were not as intense and unstoppable, leading to activists calling on council meetings and legal actions. Against this background, there was more communication and cooperation with both the government and the investor during the protests in Vake Park compared to Panorama Tbilisi.

The movement 'Defend Vake Park' showed a higher level of unity among participants in comparison with 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. During the former movement, diverse groups of individuals united for the cause, while during the latter movement, a lack of unity was observed due to the participants' unwillingness to compromise on their interests. Furthermore, the absence of strong leadership and the failure of the functioning 'Together' movement contributed to the lack of unification.

The protests against the construction of Hotel Budapest attracted significantly more people than those against 'Panorama Tbilisi' for three reasons. The first reason for the difference in participants stems from the central location of Vake Park, compared to the more scattered locations of the Panorama project that are harder to reach. The second reason is that 'Defend Vake Park' was considered more politically neutral than Ivanishvili's project. Finally, the diverse activities organised in Vake Park were aimed at a wider audience compared to the protest actions of 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. During the 'Defend Vake Park' protests, a stronger commitment was demonstrated than at the time 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' was happening. While activists in Vake Park occupied the park for an extended period, protesters against 'Panorama Tbilisi' saw a decreasing number of participants over time. As less and less individuals were present during the protests, the level of commitment became weaker in 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'.

The higher level of commitment during the protests against Hotel Budapest was due to the emotional attachment to Vake Park among the protesters, whereas the weaker commitment during Panorama can be explained by the ambivalent attitudes of Georgians towards the project; this ambivalence was connected to propaganda of the

government, which claimed that Panorama Tbilisi would bring development to the city by creating jobs and other opportunities.

6 Beyond the Success/Failure Binary: Urban Social Movements as Meaning-Making Processes

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the outcomes of the two urban social movements 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' focusing on processes of meaning-making. It will answer the following question: What ideals, discourse and practices survive and flourish after the urban social movement declines? To do so, the theoretical framework of meaning-making by (Kurzman 2008), discussed in Chapter 3, will be utilised.

Chapter 6 is divided into two parts. Firstly, it will examine four themes that were identified throughout the interviews. Secondly, a conclusion will be given that answers the question: What ideals, discourse and practices survive and flourish after the urban social movement declines?

6.2 Meaning-Making in (Urban) Social Movements

6.2.1 Innovative Use of Social Media

The first theme that was identified throughout the interviews relates to new ways of using social media networks. The efficient use of such networks is not a new phenomenon: the Gudiashvili Square protests already showcased how social media was employed to consolidate public opinion (Salukvadze and Golubchikov 2016: 52). However, the previous chapter highlighted the innovativeness of using platforms such as Twitter. Respondent 4 (2023) argued that the social media platform played a significant role during the 'Defend Vake Park' movement. As the participant proclaimed: 'I think you have to use the new technologies and the new things that are currently available. At that time, in Vake Park, [...] Twitter was very effective because it brought people very quickly together and it really helped' (ibid.). The strategy was as follows: when the police arrived to clear roadblocks, allowing construction

workers to come in, a Tweet would be posted that approximately 300 people would receive through SMS. One activist mentioned that within fifteen minutes, about 100 people gathered to stop the police. This targeted way of communication mobilised supporters quickly and successfully (France 24 2014; Interview 4 2023). More commonly, participants of the two urban activism use Facebook, which proved highly effective for recruitment, as well as for facilitating discussions and decision-making processes. Within closed groups, strategies could be planned based on consensus through diverse approaches (Berikishvili and Sichinava 2018: 5-6). Despite the online engagement of participants, it is important to note that older studies (Tsuladze et al. 2017: 336) have noted that the scale of social media in Georgia does not necessarily correspond with action on the ground.

6.2.2 Changing Discourse of Urban Issues

The second theme that was highlighted by the urban social movements' participants was the transformation in discourse regarding urban issues. According to interviewee 9, 'the Vake Park protests [...] changed the understanding of the meaning of green spaces in the city and after some years, people also feel it too. And also after this huge protest [...], politics changed because like there was no single word about greening before. Afterwards, everyone started to talk about it; and also during the pre-election campaign at least one sentence was mentioned about green spaces in the city and ecology' (Interview 9 2023). Thus, the Vake Park protests raised awareness on issues related to public (green) spaces and ecology, leading to a re-evaluation of its meanings. These changes have not only reached the minds of the public, but also those on the policy-level. Even though urban-related issues are not a priority for the government at the time of writing this research due to political instability in Georgia, respondent 9 is hopeful that 'after the war [in Ukraine], I think everything is going to start to be rebuilt and the situation is going to get more stable. [...] Maybe there are no radical changes now. But there is a demand to have a healthier city and more green city and to take care of these small but still green spaces' (Interview 9 2023).

In the case of 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', respondent 8 (2023) confirmed that the protests changed ways of thinking about urban issues too. It transformed the discourse on planning, cultural heritage and mobility. As the activist argued: 'I think

it [Panorama protests] was successful anyway [in the way] that it highlighted at least the problem, and it kind of generated discussions around planning issues, [...] cultural heritage and mobility, because there was a very strong argument about mobility as well: the concentration of such a huge retail and commercial space in this tiny part of the city, which is already crowded and already congested, would bring about [...] even more traffic into the area. So, there was also a big argument against the Panorama Project'. The participant further explains that: 'If we go now to the location, you will see that the whole square [Pushkin Square] [...] will be used as a parking space. Instead of that, they could [...] make it more recreational, but it has now been given to cars' (ibid.). These perspectives show that the social movements' influence was not limited to the realisation of certain objectives. Rather, they succeeded in changing the narrative surrounding urban issues, convincing the public to rethink and consider the significance of public (green) spaces, ecology, cultural heritage, planning and mobility. As the changing discourse influenced considerations on policy-level, the voices of the activists had a wide-reaching impact.

6.2.3 Combination of Legal and Activist Methods

The third theme that was brought to light by the activists was the simultaneous use of legal and activist tactics. As interviewee 7 (2023) pointed out in the context of 'Defend Vake Park', 'Vake Park actually was the first, and I think the most successful activist case, because activists used the legal method, but also the activist method [on] how to stop physically building. [...] Most of them had tents and places to stay, and people were staying overnight to not let the big and heavy machinery come in and start the building process' (ibid.). Respondent 2 (2023) confirmed the cooperation between legal and civil society organisations while describing the way *Green Alternative* operated during the Vake Park protests. The NGO, which leads legal actions related to environmental protection, led a lawsuit on behalf of grassroots movement *Guerilla Gardening*. Within this cooperation, which lasted almost three years, the interviewee stressed the special role of Nata Peradze: 'she's a real leader and I think that she made it [winning of 'Vake Park' case] happen. I would never say it to the public to diminish the others, but yeah, if [it was] not [for] Nata, I don't think that these people would work together; [...] We mainly communicated with her, and she was communicating with others' (ibid.).

In the context of the legal-civil society tandem, interviewee 7 (2023) adds that 'this is a bit of a legal detail, but what saved us was [the following:] before the promise [the new GD government made to preserve the park] was fulfilled, and also before we kind of started this war [...] the building permits, expired. So, they did have a statute of limitations. Finally, we got so lucky. They were not able to build the hotel there anymore.' These political conditions were unfortunately not present in the case of 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. Hence, the success of the practice combining legal and activist measures depends on how powerful the opponent is of the urban activists. As respondent explained 'the opponent in the Vake Park [case] was way weaker than Ivanishvili eventually' (ibid.). The participant further explains that 'all experts [...] warned him [Ivanishvili] that this [construction of 'Panorama Tbilisi'] would be against the soul and against the structure of old Tbilisi, or the historic zones. But he used all his powers, political as well as financial, and still managed to get the permits. So, me and my colleagues, we have appealed those permits [...] and tried to defend our arguments in the court. Unfortunately, we were not successful largely because the court system is also heavily dependent on the ruling party, and they would never ever adopt a decision that would hurt the ruling parties' financial interest (ibid.).'

6.2.4 Employment of Refreshing Tactics

The final theme that was discussed among the participants was the utilisation of original practises. As claimed by respondent 8 (2023) in the context of 'Defend Vake Park': 'it didn't have to involve fancy tactics and it didn't have to involve public campaigning [to be successful].' An example of the creative way of protesting is illustrated by the action 'Picnic at the City Hall'. Interviewee 4 (2023) explained that the activists gathered in front of the City Hall with a placard that read: 'A hotel in the park? Picnic in the city hall!'. The idea behind this symbolic act was to demonstrate that if they were being forced out of the park, they could challenge the presence of decision-makers in their 'working space.' According to the activist, this tactic was considered 'surprising' and strongly contrasted with the so-called 'bureaucratic people' typically associated with the city hall environment (ibid.). Furthermore, the activist pointed out another powerful action, which was a symbol of 'SOS' formed by different individuals standing side by side. The respondent noted that although 'we

understood that we were not so many people, still we could form this SOS. It was also a very good sign for this protest event' (ibid.). Finally, a creative tactic in the context of 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' was the use of stencil art, which was spread throughout the city's urban space. Respondent 4 elaborated on this form of art: 'we used [...] all this artistic stencil art, graffiti art. [...] It was somehow important [...] to show [the city's inhabitants] that we are struggling for something.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at four themes that were identified during interviews with ten activists that took part in the two urban social movements 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. It utilised the meaning-making approach of Kurzman (2007), which demonstrated the enduring impact of these movements after their decline. By emphasising the ideals, discourse, and practices that persist and evolve beyond the declared goals, the binary assessment of success or failure becomes problematised. This conclusion will aim to answer the following question: What ideals, discourse and practices survive and flourish after the urban social movement declines?

The first identified theme is the innovative use of social media networks. In particular, the efficient utilisation of Twitter played a significant role in the 'Defend Vake Park' movement, bringing people together quickly and effectively. By employing targeted communication through Tweets and SMS, activists successfully mobilised supporters within minutes to halt police actions.

The second theme that is highlighted throughout the interviews is the transformation in the discourse surrounding urban issues. 'Defend Vake Park' raised awareness on the importance of public (green) spaces and ecology, impacting both public perception and policy-level considerations. Similarly, the 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' protests changed the way urban issues were perceived, generating discussions on planning, cultural heritage, and mobility. These movements succeeded in shifting the narrative, encouraging the public to reconsider the value of green spaces and cultural heritage.

The third theme emphasised by the activists was the combination of legal and activist tactics: an approach demonstrated during the protests against Hotel Budapest. The cooperation between legal and civil society organisations (i.e. *Green Alternative* and *Guerilla Gardening*) was crucial in achieving positive outcomes in the court battles that lasted nearly three years. The leadership of Nata Peradze played a vital role in facilitating effective communication and collaboration between activists and formal organisations. However, in the case of 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', the lack of favourable political circumstances hindered the activists' efforts. Specifically, GD's influence on the court system and its financial interests contributed significantly to the unfavourable context. Hence, the effective combination of legal and activist tactics can be instrumental in achieving success in social movements only if the right political conditions are in place.

The final theme explored in the interviews was the innovative use of refreshing and creative tactics. Participants of the discussed urban social movements have pointed out that success did not necessarily require elaborate strategies, which can be demonstrated by the 'Picnic at the City Hall' action. This surprising tactic contrasted with the bureaucratic environment commonly associated with the City Hall. Another simple, yet powerful action involved individuals forming an 'SOS' symbol, signifying unity and urgency during the protests. Notably, the movement 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' saw stencil art being created throughout the city. These refreshing strategies, beyond being successful or not, served as powerful symbols and had the potential to generate public interest and engagement.

This chapter has shown that the ideals, discourse, and practices of urban social movements in Georgia thrive beyond their active phases. Processes of meaning-making, through the various aforementioned themes, allow for an enduring impact on public consciousness and policy considerations. Meaning-making has been shown to challenge the binary view of success/failure of an urban social movement: even though the stated objectives may not always be fully realised, the processes of meaning-making contribute to a legacy that continues to shape the urban landscape of Georgia. The lessons learned from these movements serve as inspiration and encouragement for future endeavours seeking social and urban change.

7 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to understand the impact of urban social movements in Tbilisi, Georgia, beyond the binary distinction of success/failure. It examined two urban social movements: (1) 'Defend Vake Park', which was considered a success; and (2) 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!', which failed to reach its objectives, placing meaning-making at the centre of analysis. The central question of this thesis is: How can the impact of urban social movements focused on preserving public space be understood through the lens of meaning-making in post-socialist Georgia? Thereby, this thesis contributed to the growing trend in recent years of research on urban developments in the post-Soviet space. In particular, it has demonstrated how the loss of public space has led to the mobilisation of civil society in a complex context of post-socialist conditions; revealed the way these actors engaged urban protest by utilising both visible and less-visible activities to express their discontent; and shown how strengths and weaknesses of urban social movements can be understood in a nuanced way by focusing on the ideals, discourses and practices that survive and flourish after their decline.

This thesis is built on two analyses. Firstly, Chapter 5 discussed two case studies of urban social movements in Georgia, namely, 'Defend Vake Park' and 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!'. It highlighted the main similarities and differences between these movements by employing the dWUNC theoretical framework (Wouters and Walgrave 2017). The main similarities were found in the component of diversity, where both movements consisted of similar core participants from relatively socially privileged backgrounds. However, 'Defend Vake Park' attracted a more diverse crowd due to the emotional attachment to Vake Park across generations, as well as the festive (and non-political) activities which attracted a crowd beyond the common participants. The main differences were attributed to the components of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment. 'Defend Vake Park' exhibited more dedication, persistence, and innovative tactics, leading to more communication and cooperation with the government and investor involved, while 'No to Panorama Tbilisi!' faced challenges in unification and commitment. The analysis revealed how multifaceted urban social movements are in post-socialist Tbilisi, and demonstrated the different

components that should be taken into account to understand the outcomes of urban protest aimed at protecting public space; the unique example of Tbilisi is only one example from the diverse contexts and paths that post-socialist cities in Eurasia followed in the wake of Soviet collapse.

Secondly, Chapter 6 focused on four themes of meaning-making processes that were identified during interviews with participants that were involved in the two selected urban movements. These themes included the innovative use of social media networks, transformation in discourse surrounding urban issues, the combination of legal and activist tactics, and the employment of refreshing protest strategies. The analysis found that the impact of (urban) social movements goes beyond the binary of success/failure by demonstrating how meaning-making processes endure after the active phases of the protests. It showed how such movements, regardless of whether they achieved their stated goals, have the power to transform the meaning of urban protest through the ideals, discourse, and practices that have survived and flourished. Hence, these findings contradict the traditional perspective on urban protest impact through a restrictive lens of success/failure.

To further explore the impact of urban protest through meaning-making processes, additional cases of urban protest in Tbilisi should be studied in future research. A question that remains unanswered is how the power of urban social movements in Tbilisi is understood in other Georgian cities; this puzzle could be examined in upcoming studies by comparing the impact of protest movements in Tbilisi with other Georgian cities. Furthermore, these processes could also be explored in a transnational context with other post-socialist cities to fully comprehend how impact of urban social movements can be studied across different environments with the similar legacies and challenges.

Bibliography

'Activists block hotel construction to protest Tbilisi's shrinking green space.' 2014. *France 24*, February 11, 2014. https://observers.france24.com/en/20140210-activists-block-hotel-construction-protest-tbilisi-shrinking-green-space, accessed on 14 June 2023.

'Activists Say 'SOS' for Old Tbilisi as Massive Development Goes Ahead.' 2015a. *Democracy & Freedom Watch (DFWatch)*, 1 February, 2015. https://dfwatch.net/activists-say-sos-for-old-tbilisi-as-massive-development-goes-ahead-20508-33275, accessed on 14 June 2023.

Adams, William C. 2015. 'Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews.' In *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, edited by Kathryn E. Newcomer, Harry P. Hatry and Joseph S. Wholey, 492-505. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Anderson, Eva. 2014. 'Georgian Co-Investment Fund's 2014 Projects: Further Transparency Needed.' *Transparency International (TI)*, May 29, 2014. https://transparency.ge/en/blog/georgian-co-investment-fund-s-2014-projects-further-transparency-needed, accessed on 2 February 2023.

Blee, Kathleen M. and Verta Taylor. 2002. 'Chapter 4: Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research.' In *Methods of Social Movement Research*, edited by Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg, 92-117. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Buyandelgeriyn, Manduhai. 'Post-Post-Transition Theories: Walking on Multiple Paths.' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (October 2008): 235-250.

Cagara, Dominik K. 2016. 'Hundreds rally against Ivanishvili's 'Panorama Tbilisi' project.' *Democracy & Freedom Watch (DFWatch)*, February 29, 2016. https://dfwatch.net/hundreds-rally-against-ivanishvilis-panorama-tbilisi-project-40538, accessed on 23 January 2020.

Castells, Manuel. 1972. *La Question Urbaine* [The Urban Question]. Paris: F. Maspero.

Castells, Manuel. 1983. *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Csomós, György, Zsolt Jenő Farkas, Ronald A. Kolcsár, Péter Szilassi, and Zoltán Kovács. 'Measuring socio-economic disparities in green space availability in post-socialist cities.' *Habitat International* 117 (September 2021): 1-9.

Curro, Costanza. 'A Critical Assessment of Informal Practices as Resistance: The Case of Birzha in Georgia.' *Caucasus Survey* 5, no. 1 (January 2017): 65-84.

Darieva, Tsypylma, Wolfgang Kaschuba, and Melanie Krebs. 2011. *Urban Spaces after Socialism: Ethnographies of Public Places in Eurasian cities*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.

Darieva, Tsypylma and Carola S. Neugebauer. 2020. *Urban Activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. Berlin: DOM publishers.

De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Della Porta, Donatella, and Diani, Mario. 'Forms, Repertoires and Cycles of Protest.' In *Social Movements: An Introduction*, edited by Donatella Della Port and Mario Diani, 165-92. Oxford: Blackwell.

Della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani. 2006. *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Della Porta, Donatella. 2015. *Social Movements in Times of Austerity*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Domaradzka, Anna. 'Urban Social Movements and the Tight to the City: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Urban Mobilization.' *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 29 (August 2018): 607-620.

Dundua, Salome, Tamar Amashukeli, and Sandro Tabatadze. 'What Makes Social Movements Successful: The Case of Gudiashvili Square.' *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 8 (2022a): 1413-1432.

Dundua, Salome, Tamar Karaia, and Sandro Tabatadze. 'Tbilisi Urban Social Movements: On the Verge of Success/Failure.' *European Journal of Transformation Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022b): 21-39.

'Environmental Activists Celebrate Win in 6-year Battle Against Vake Park Hotel.' 2019. *OC Media*. January 30, 2019, https://oc-media.org/environmental-activists-celebrate-win-in-6-year-battle-against-vake-park-hotel/, accessed on 23 January 2022.

Facebook. 'Guerilla Gardening.' Accessed February 10, 2023. https://www.facebook.com/Tbilisitrees/about_details.

Gogishvili, David. 'Competing for Space in Tbilisi: Transforming Residential Courtyards to Parking in an Increasingly Car-Dependent City.' *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (October 2021): 1-25.

Gurchiani, Ketevan. 2022. 'Die Verborgene Macht der Bäume. Urbaner Widerstand in Tiflis [The Hidden Power of Trees. Urban Resistance in Tbilisi].' In *Verdeckter Widerstand in demokratischen Gesellschaften*, edited by Ferdinand Sutterlüty and Almut Poppinga, 157-187. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.

Harvey, David. 'The Right to the City.' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 4 (December 2003): 939-941.

Harvey, David. 'The Right to the City.' *New Left Review* 53 (September/October 2008): 23-40.

Harvey, David. 'David Harvey—The Party of Wall Street Meets its Nemesis.' *Verso*, October 28, 2011. https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/777-david-harvey-the-party-of-wall-street-meets-its-nemesis.

Hirt, Sonia A. 2012. *Iron Curtains: Gates, Suburbs and Privatization of Space in the Post-Socialist city*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Hirt, Sonia. 2014. 'The Post-Public City: Experiences from Post-Socialist Europe.' *Globalizing Architecture: Flows and Disruptions*. Refereed Proceedings of the 102nd Annual Conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture: 123-9.

Inclán, María. 'Sliding Doors of Opportunity: Zapatistas and Their Cycle of Protest." Mobilization: An International Quarterly 14, no. 1 (2009): 85-106.

Interview 1. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 22 March 2023.

Interview 2. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 26 April 2023.

Interview 3. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 27 March 2023.

Interview 4. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 4 April 2023.

Interview 5. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 1 May 2023.

Interview 6. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 29 March 2023.

Interview 7. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 3 April 2023.

Interview 8. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 6 April 2023.

Interview 9. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 20 April 2023.

Interview 10. Conducted by Iris Vijverberg. 20 April 2023.

Israelyan, Yana. 2014. 'Georgian Eco-Warriors in Battle to Save Tbilisi Park.' *Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR)*, 1 April, 2014. https://iwpr.net/global-voices/georgian-eco-warriors-battle-save-tbilisi-park, accessed on 14 June, 2023.

Jacobsson, Kerstin. 'Introduction: The Development of Urban Movements in Central and Eastern Europe.' In *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Kerstin Jacobsson, 1-32. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015.

Jacobsson, Kerstin, and Steven Saxonberg. 2015. *Social Movements in Post-Communist Europe and Russia*. London: Routledge.

Jacobsson, Kerstin, and Elżbieta Korolczuk. 'Mobilizing Grassroots in the City: Lessons for Civil Society Research in Central and Eastern Europe.' *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33 (May 2019): 125-142.

Jones, Amy. 2019. 'The Rise of Urban Activism in Tbilisi.' *Georgia Today (GT)*. February 11, 2019. http://gtarchive.georgiatoday.ge/news/14434/The-Rise-of-Urban-Activism-in-Tbilisi, accessed on 23 January 2022.

Kalyukin, Alexander, Thomas Borén, and Andrew Byerley. 'The second generation of post-socialist change: Gorky Park and Public Space in Moscow.' *Urban Geography* 36, no. 5 (April 2015): 674-95.

Kitschelt, Herbert P. 'Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies.' *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (January 1986): 57-85.

Kriesi, Hanspeter. 'The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilization." *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* 3 (1995): 167-198.

Kurzman, Charles. 'Meaning-Making in Social Movements.' *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (December 2008): 5-15.

Lomsadze, Giorgi. 2014. 'Georgia: Activists Agitate for "Clean and Green" Revolution.' *Eurasianet*, February 28, 2014. https://eurasianet.org/georgia-activists-agitate-for-clean-and-green-revolution, accessed on 14 June 2023.

Lorusso, Marilisa. 2018. 'The Panorama Tbilisi Project: A Monster in Town.' *OBC Transeuropa*, April 4 2018. https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Georgia/The-Panorama-Tbilisi-project-a-monster-in-town-186839, accessed on 14 June 2023.

Low, Setha, and Neil Smith. 2006. *The Politics of Public Space*. New York: Routledge.

Mantey, Dorota, and Agnieszka Kępkowicz. 'Types of Public Spaces: The Polish Contribution to the Discussion of Suburban Public Space.' *The Professional Geographer* 70, no. 4 (April 2018): 633-54.

Matthews, Glenna. 1992. *The Rise of Public Woman*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Mayer, Margit. 'Contesting the Neoliberalization of Urban Governance.' In *Contesting Neoliberalism: Urban frontiers*, edited by Helga Leitner, Jamie Peck and Eric S. Sheppard, 90-115. New York: The Guilford Press, 2007.

Mayer, Margit, and Julie-Anne Boudreau. 'Social Movements in Urban Politics: Trends in Research and Practice.' In *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Politics*, edited by Peter John, Karen Mossberger, and Susan E. Clarke, 273-92. London: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Mayer, Margit. 'First World Urban Activism'. *City* 17, no. 1 (February 2013): 5–19.

McAdam, Doug. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 'To Map Contentious Politics.' *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, no. 1 (1996): 17-34.

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Melucci, Alberto. 1989. *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: Guilford Press.

Naderifar, Mahin, Hamideh Goli, and Fereshteh Ghaljaie. 'Snowball Sampling: A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative research.' *Strides in Development of Medical Education* 14, no. 3 (September 2017).

Nair, Prathap. 2018. 'Tbilisi Comes Up for Air.' *Bloomberg*, June 1, 2018. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia, accessed on 14 June 2023.

Neugebauer, Carola S., and Lela Rekhviashvili. 'Loss and (Re-)construction of Public Space in post-Soviet Cities.' *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 35, no. 7/8 (July 2015): 1-6.

Nielsen, Finn Sivert. 'The Eye of the Whirlwind: Russian Identity and Soviet Nation Building. Quests for Meaning in a Soviet Metropolis.' http://www.anthrobase.com/Txt/N/Nielsen_F_S_03.htm#110_A.%20Prospekt%20and%20Dvor, accessed on 14 June 2023.

'Occupy Vake Park.' 2015. *Studio Monitor*, 12 February 2015. https://monitori.ge/en/occupy-vake-park/, accessed on 14 June, 2023.

Orum, Anthony M., and Zachary Neal. 2009. *Common Ground?: Readings and Reflections on Public Space*. New York: Routledge.

Osipovi, Natalie. 2014. 'People Oppose the Hotel Construction in Vake Park'. *The Messenger Online*, January 13, 2014. https://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/3029_january_13_2014/3029_natalie.html, accessed June 14, 2023.

Pickvance, Chris. 'From Urban Social Movements to Urban Movements: a Review and Introduction to a Symposium on Urban Movements." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 1 (March 2003): 102-109.

'Protecting Vake Park.' 2014. *Studio Monitor*, 4 April 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHrYPxk4qSw, accessed on 14 June, 2023.

'Protest Camp in Tbilisi to Prevent a Hotel Construction in Vake Park.' *Democracy & Freedom Watch (DFWatch)*, February 10, 2014, https://dfwatch.net/protest-camp-in-tbilisi-to-prevent-new-hotel-in-park-75418-26390, accessed on 14 June, 2023.

Pruijt, Hans. 'Urban Movements.' In *Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology*, edited by George Ritzer, 5115–5119. Malden: Blackwell, 2007.

Rekhviashvili, Lela. 'Marketization and the Public-Private Divide: Contestations between the State and the Petty Traders over the Access to Public Space in Tbilisi.' *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 35, no. 7/8 (November 2015): 478-496.

Rekhviashvili, Lela, David Sichinava and Esma Berikishvili. 'Urban Protest Movements in Tbilisi: Social Movements are Strong, but Big Capital is Stronger.' In *Urban Activism in Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, edited by Darieva, Tsypylma and Carola S. Neugebauer, 88-97. Berlin: DOM publishers, 2020.

Rekhviashvili, Lela. 'We Need to Talk about Political Society: Subaltern Resistances Beyond Civil Society in Eastern Europe and Eurasia.' *Central Asian Survey* (September 2022): 1-19.

Salukvadze, Joseph and Oleg Golubchikov. 'City as a Geopolitics: Tbilisi, Georgia — A Globalizing Metropolis in a Turbulent Region.' *Cities* 52 (March 2016): 39-54.

Salukvadze, Joseph, and Kristof Van Assche. 'Multiple transformations, Coordination and Public Goods. Tbilisi and the Search for Planning as Collective Strategy.' *European Planning Studies* (May 2022): 1-19.

Scott, James C. 1992. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sheppard, Valerie. 2020. *Research methods for the Social Sciences: An introduction*. Vancouver: BCCampus.

Stanilov, Kiril. 2007. 'Democracy, Markets, and Public Space in the Transitional Societies of Central and Eastern Europe." In *The Post-Socialist City*, edited by Kiril Stanilov, 269–283. Dordrecht: Springer.

Stenning, Alison, Adrian Smith, Alena Rochovská and Dariusz Świątek. 2011. *Domesticating Neo-Liberalism: Spaces of Economic Practice and Social Reproduction in Post-Socialist Cities*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Tarrow, Sidney. 1998. *Power in Movement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tarrow, Sidney. 2011. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

'Tbilisians Call for Urban Development Plan to Save City's Old Districts.' 2015b. *Democracy & Freedom Watch (DFWatch),* June 7, 2015. https://dfwatch.net/tbilisians-call-for-urban-development-plan-to-save-citys-old-districts-36291, accessed on 15 June 2023.

Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. New York: Random House.

Tilly, Charles. 'Social Movements as Historically Specific Clustres of Political Performances.' *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, no. 38 (1994): 1-30.

Tilly, Charles. 1999. 'From Interactions to Outcomes in Social Movements'. In *How Social Movements Matter*, edited by Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly, 253-270. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tilly, Charles. 2006. *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tilly, Charles. 2008. *Contentious Performances*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tsintsabadze, Anano. 2019a. 'Campaign to Protect Vake Park in Tbilisi – Case Study.' *Community Action Training (CAT)*, June 4, 2019. https://www.catprogramme.org/2019/06/04/campaign-to-protect-vake-park-in-tbilisi-case-study/, accessed on 14 June 2023.

Tsintsabadze, Anano. 2019b. 'A Human Victory at Vake Park', *Open Society – Georgia Foundation*, 8 Febuary 2019, https://osgf.ge/voice/vakis-parkiskacuri-gamarjveba/, accessed on 14 June 2023.

Tsuladze, Lia, Nana Macharashvili and Ketevan Pachulia. 'SOS Tbilisi: Challenges to Environmental Civic Participation in Georgia.' *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 5 (April 2017): 327-343.

Tsuladze, Lia. 'A Monocrat's Hobby and its Power: on Shadow Politics in Georgia.' *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 1 (December 2021): 42-59.

Verhulst, Joris, and Stefaan Walgrave. 'The First Time is the Hardest? A Cross-National and Cross-Issue Comparison of First-Time Protest Participants.' *Political Behavior* 31 (January 2009): 455-84.

Wainwright, Oliver. 2018. 'Vanity Projects and Kamikaze Loggias: Tbilisi's Architectural Disaster.' *The Guardian*, November 15, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/nov/15/vanity-projects-and-kamikaze-loggias-tbilisi-architectural-disaster, accessed 23 January 2022.

Whyte, William H. 2012. *City: Rediscovering the Center*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Wouters, Ruud, and Stefaan Walgrave. 'What Makes Protest Powerful? Reintroducing and Elaborating Charles Tilly's WUNC Concept.' *SSRN Electronic Journal* (February 2017): 1-23.

Zhelnina, Anna. '"Hanging Out," Creativity, and the Right to the City: Urban Public Space in Russia before and after the Protest Wave of 2011–2012.' *Stasis* 2, no. 1 (June 2014).

Zhelnina, Anna. 'Learning to Use 'Public Space': Urban Space in Post-Soviet St. Petersburg.' *The Open Urban Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (2013): 57-64.

Zhvania, Irakli. 2020. 'Tbilisi, Georgia: Preserving Historic Public Spaces in a Rapidly Changing City.' In *The Life Cycle of Public Spaces: Strategies for Planning, Financing, and Managing Urban Places*, edited by Jon Kher Kaw, Hyunji Lee and Sameh Wahba, 387-402. Washington: World Bank Publications, 2020.

Appendix I: Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your professional background?
2. How do you relate to Tbilisi and its urban space, development, and transitions?
3. At what point did you feel that urban protest was needed in Tbilisi?
4. When did you decide to become active in urban activism?
5. What was your main motivation for joining these activities?
6. How would you describe other actors that were involved in similar activities?
7. How would you like to contribute to urban development in Tbilisi?
8. How did you get involved in the urban movements against the planned constructions in Vake Park and/or the Panorama Project?
9. What was your specific role in 'Defend Vake Park' and/or 'No to Panorama Tbilisi'?
10. In your opinion, which tactics and strategies were the most effective in your activism? Why?
11. In your opinion, what were the main difficulties you faced in your activism? Why?
12. Have you tried to cooperate with other stakeholders? If so, elaborate.
13. In your experience, how successful were the protests against Hotel Budapest and/or Panorama Project generally? Why?

Appendix II: Ethical Approval

University of Glasgow
College of Social Sciences

Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

Notification of Ethics Application Outcome – UG and PGT Student Applications

---

Application Details

Undergraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☐ Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application ☒

Application Number: PGT/SPS/2023/008/CEERES

Applicant's Name: Iris Vijverberg

Project Title: The Urban Struggle of the Post-Socialist City: Tbilisi's Fight for Public Space

Application Status: Fully Approved

Date of Review: 23/02/2023

Start Date of Approval 23/02/2023 End Date of Approval 30/11/2023

NB: Only if the applicant has been given approval can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.