

Conceptual connection between "the public" and "civil society" in global context

Abstract

According to the “classical” definition of Habermas, the public sphere is a phenomenon of modern bourgeois society (“the public” was initially referred to members of bourgeois saloons, who were able to discuss social and political events, and then publish their views in papers and magazines). It is important to notice, that this is a vision of “public sphere” that was formulated in the middle of 20-th century and observes the realities of “the public of 19-th century”. By the end 20-th century public space and the public itself had changed dramatically – together with the changes brought with the shift from modernity to post-modernism, driven by mass media and dominated by mass culture, where the “responsible public” turns into “target audience”.

The goal of “re-defining the public” is closely connected with the task of clarifying the new meaning of “public space”, which is also rapidly changing due to technological revolution, availability of modern communication technology to the wide range of active citizens, and the same time – new power of electronic mass media (particularly television and the Internet) that has created a new phenomena – “mediatization of society”. Our research collective at HSE Public Policy Department has been working for quite a long time on the issues of interaction between “the civil society” and “the power” in particular political regimes, mostly in Russia and former USSR countries, but also in a broader comparative prospective¹. Recently, searching for “true actors for social change” and “civic agents for new public policy”, seeking to distinguish “real civil society actors” from “fake ones”, we focused on big on-line survey of social activists groups in Russian Federation. The methodology we used was based on matching those groups’ activities with their beliefs and values (such as “public awareness”, “civic ethics”, and “community spirit”). The central concept to all the other notions mentioned is “the public”. Our strategic aim is to re-define the concept itself, to see it not as an adjective (like in “public space” or “public good”), but as a *definition of a social actor* – and to trace its transformation in today’s rapidly changing world of “globalised informatization”. Particularly relevant to our field of study are the events in Russia that took place throughout the last year and came to be known as “the White Revolution”, when hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens gathered in the streets of Moscow, Saint Petersburg and many other Cities to protest against unchangeable power and elections fraud. These events have totally transformed the “public space” of a seemingly-controlled political regime in Russia. Attempts to describe those events in the analytical language of “civil society versus power” were proved not adequate: the collective social actor in this case was different. A new analytical frame and a new conceptual language needs to be developed to describe both this new actor, and the new space in which it acts.

¹ [Belyaeva. 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2011].

In this paper we will begin with describing three main traditions in understanding public policy and governance. We suggest an explanation of how those traditions are related to the public itself (examining such concepts as “quality of public”, which allows – or does not allow – certain political institutions and certain mechanisms of coordination of public interests be formed and take root). Then, we will try to define certain characteristics of “public” (and especially “protesting public”) as a social actor, which allow to distinguish it from a similar, but different category of “structures of civil society”. Following this, we will look into a specific case of “White Protests” in Russia, which demonstrate specific behavior of “protesting public” and its major characteristics. We will finalize with some proposals for the further studies.

Public policy in three traditions

Conceptualization of the notion “public policy” began in the United States in the end of the sixties, and was driven by the need to re-design public service, to make it more effective, dynamic, and responsive to societal needs. Since then, though experiencing numerous amendments and variations, a recognizable model of defining public policy notion has emerged, which is closely associated with the actions of governing bodies. The most famous definition public policy is “whatever governments choose to do or not to do”. This allows to define a particular “American tradition” in public policy and governance studies, that is very close to the theory of “public administration”. In many cases this tradition views “public policy” as just a “first step” of “public administration”, as creating a program that needs to be implemented.

The “European” tradition developed later, largely on the basis of the “American” tradition, but focusing in the first place on the “variety of actors”, among which the Government itself is not necessarily the main one. European tradition is focused more on non-state actors, as well as on defining their different and often conflicting interests, mechanisms of regulations, procedures of agreement and reconciliation, including the monitoring of the decisions, based on compromises. New understanding of public policy as a system of “co-management” is developing in the practice of supranational European institutions, the Council of Europe and the European Union.²

No wonder that the concept of “public policy” and the concept of “governance” presents the most relief in studies of the European Union devoted to the analysis of decision-making and institutions. Unlike the nation-state, the European Union has no essentially “chief executive institution”, and states incoming the EU are completely equal. Thus, all members of this alliance are equally involved in “co-management”, which specifies *managing the mutual influence on each other*. Of course, this system of co-management demanded a creation of an additional set of structures for coordination of interests, both between countries and governments, and (with the involvement of other actors external to the EU) -

2 [R.Holzhacker, E.Albaek. Edward Elgar. 2007]

representatives of national and international business networks, public and municipal associations, etc. With every new challenge - movement of labor resources, common education and migration policies, the harmonization of price policies for different sectors of the economy – a new appropriate structure was created. The result is a layered system of coordination of interests named “the committee system”.

The authors of the report "Russian Business Lobbying in the U.S. and the EU: Evolution and Prospects"³ indicate that at the end of 1990 in addition to the basic political institutions of the EU at various levels of the Union's public policy there were approximately 1400 different committees and working groups, and this number has risen to 1800 by 2005, and these institutions employ 80 thousand people. The authors emphasize that “the very nature of the formulation and decision-making in the EU turns out to be largely mediated by non-direct participation of EU interest groups and pressure groups of various nature and purpose in the institutional structure. Those groups include business organizations, large corporations, civil society organizations, regional and ethnic formations of the Union countries, many cultural, scientific and other entities”⁴. However, this European approach does not put an end to formation of the concept of public policy.

At the present stage, the increasing popularity and interest to the development of public policy moved to the global level, where co-management and mutual influences include not only the countries of one region - Europe - but countries around the whole world. Most current works about public policy and governance today are devoted to global relations. Among them we should note a compilation of works under the edition of Patricia Kenneth, in which, based on the vast material of the analysis of practical examples of mechanisms of “global coordination” the author explores the strategy and tactics of global co-management actors, which lead to approval of new norms and rules of engagement in a rapidly globalizing world, to formation of new institutions of harmonization of different interests, whether in the sphere of international trade, the global labor market, the environment or protecting the rights and interests of citizens, united in the global social network⁵.

There are several approaches to conceptualization of the concept of governance, defined as “a minimum of government interference, as corporate management, as the new public management, as “good governance”, or a socio-cybernetic system, a self-organizing network”⁶. However, the spectrum of these approaches is insufficient to explain the ongoing changes in modern politics, such as the process of globalization, the growing influence of international and supranational institutions, the emergence of new political spaces beyond national borders, the “diffusion of political power”, the transfer of power from government to non-state political actors, as well as “delegitimization of the nation state”, the crisis of “welfare state” and the whole old management paradigm based on hierarchical control of the state, on sending “top-down” signals⁷.

3 [Peregudov, Utkin, Kostyaev, 2009: 14-15; see also Wallace, Young 1997: 20; Shokhin, Korolev, 2008]

4 [ibid.]

5 [Kennet 2008].

6 [Rhodes, 2008: 51-74]

7 [Archibugi, Zurn. 2006: 178].

The new understanding of governance must encompass the idea of joint management, changing the management paradigm and offering a new style of management which means the inclusion of an increasing number of political actors in the process of formulation and implementation of public policy. The process of blurring the boundaries between public and private sectors has started, which demands new mechanisms of governance, based on other resources than the government's authority and sanctions⁸. Political administration in the style of this new understanding of governance (“joint” or “mutual” control) suggests a new role for government and the state, acting as *moderators of political and administrative process* to harmonize and promote the interests of different social groups and political actors competing with each other. Moreover, the “mutual” administration is based on the inclusion of non-state political actors and institutions not only in the process of a broad and public discussion prior decisions, but also in the process of direct “doing policy”. Non-state actors are included in these processes (at the stage of elaboration and adoption of policies, and also at the stage of implementation of public-policy decisions) - through a variety of institutions, methods and techniques (outsourcing, delegation, transfer of state functions).

What unites these three existing traditions of Public Policy (American, European and global), except that they have consistently evolved, maintaining the continuity of the core concept and comprehending the new social reality? Main thing in common is the preservation of the concept of *public space* as the arena which hosts reconciliation of interests, and *the public* as a set of independent, competent and concerned citizens, who are able to participate in formulating and implementing policy decisions. It is important to note that in the development of American and European traditions into the global tradition, requirements for “quality” of the public will only increase. Their second thing in common is regarding reconciliation of interests as a policy goal, and understanding governance as collective solutions to common problems. The third common trait that unites these traditions - is an open public space for the stakeholders and the rate for approval as a principle of decision-making instead of pressure.

What distinguishes these traditions, and why we consider them as independent? The most significant trait to distinguish them is the attitude to the main actor in the public sphere, or in other words to the “strategic management subject”. In the first case (“American” tradition) such subject is a public authority (the state). In the second case (the “European” tradition) there is no main actor, and all subjects of public policy are deemed to be equal participants in decision making. In case of the “global” tradition, the focus generally moves away from the actors and focuses on the procedures, mechanisms and ways of coordinating interests. Nevertheless, if jointly agreed decisions are adopted and accepted by other actors, it shows that in some way - through particular coordinating activities - the process of such decision-making had been organized. It is also obvious, that this kind of task cannot be handled by “average” or “ordinary” actors. It is clear, that acting in the space of highly contradictory interests, such type of

⁸ [Kennett P., Edward Elgar. 2008: 4]

coordination can only be exercised by those who can suggest a strategy of collective action. Hence, our next step is the analysis of these “strategic actors”.

Categories of public policy actors. Public as an actor

Attention to “actors” of public policy was a “starting position” for the development of research approaches of the team of the Department of Public Policy, established in the National Research University “Higher School of Economics” in the early 2000's, aimed to develop the concept of “public policy”⁹. Indeed, if admittedly research institutes in Russia are weak and perform poorly, then who determines political development? Who are these actors, how do they arise, how are they managed, how do they acquire resources and influence? Finding answers to these questions have led to a series of studies, and then to the development of university courses devoted to specific kinds of “actors”, and, namely, “collective actors” having a common social nature, common symptoms that are similar types of use of political resources and similar strategies to achieve political influence.

The main actors reputedly include government authorities at different levels of government, political parties, federal and regional press, big business, regional elites, civil society organizations and movements, local communities. Obviously, not only between species but also within each species, the actors are very different. They differ not only in “political weight”, but also on other criteria, which in our opinion is not less important - on the degree of independence of its conduct in the political field. This criterion is central to political analysis, since converted to its own, “inner” qualities of the actor, which allows or does not it to build its own strategy for political behavior.

Further analysis led us to “structuring” all actors in the field of public policy in three main categories - depending on their degree of political independence. The first category - the lowest level of political independence - is the political “agents” who have not and do not implement any of its own strategy of political action. Agents act in politics for “another's interests” and “at the expense of another's resource”; in fact, they carry a political will of someone else. The second category pictures those political actors who may have their own agenda in the current policy (they possess a collective consciousness and will, and are capable of goal-setting), but they have very little of their own resources to exert significant influence on the behavior of other actors in political field. A third category of actors includes the most resourced ones. Their representation in Russian political field is quite limited. We call them “independent actors” of public policy, because such entities are not only able to formulate their own strategies for their own behavior, but also to offer (and impose) such strategies to other political actors. They have enough resources to decisively influence the behavior of other political actors (as dependent agents, and independent, but weak actors).

⁹ [Belyaeva. 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2011]

Moreover, in accordance with our research, such “full-fledged actors” of modern public policy in Russia are represented not only a “collective Kremlin” or in person the President or Prime Minister, but also by a number of public entities. For example, the “Memorial” historical and civil rights society, or the Soldiers’ Mothers Committee not only offer the state and society their agenda in public policy field, but also force authorities to take their agenda into account. “Memorial” had lobbied for Federal Law on Victims of Political Repressions, and Soldiers Mothers contributed greatly to the Army reform.

Similar approaches to the various “roles” that social actors may play in public policy are developed by sociologists within the framework of institutional theory. Within this approach crucial questions had been raised: how do the new institutions come about? To what extent do their characteristics depend on the peculiarities of their formation? N. Fliegstien, one of the most famous representatives of institutional theoretical school, discovered that actors do not simply follow accepted patterns in their field, but “have a certain amount of social skills allowing to reproduce or challenge the system of power and privilege”¹⁰ in order to transform institutions. While agreeing with the basic idea of Fliegstien about the role of “strategic actors” in the creation of institutions, we want to add that in this case we see both the “overlap” and mutual enrichment of two related disciplines - sociology and political science. Cognitive and analytical capabilities of a combination of subject-oriented approach with the “new Institutionalism” in its various versions proved to be quite productive and allow using a broader range of tools for analyzing Russian political system, as an example combining weak institutions and strong actors¹¹.

Our understanding of “the public” refers to a selective part of the society members, which unites knowledgeable, competent citizens who are able to organize themselves in pursuit of common interests. This understanding is based on the “classical” interpretations of this term, which dates back to the meaning of the term in the word “Res-publica”. It was much later, when development of social science had created a concept of “civil society”, in the meaning we use it today. “Civil society” usually refers voluntary self-organized people, whose activity leads to the articulation and implementation of “public interest” and achieving “common good”, which may bring radical change, if necessary, of the existing political institutions.

Phenomena of Res-Publica and “new-republicanism” has recently caused significant academic attention, aroused by the search of a new ideology, that would be a strong alternative to overall collectivization of Marxism and still not so individualized as Liberalism¹². This led to re-examining the functioning of democracy in some “classical republics” and its governing institutions, based on regular and volunteer public participation. This, definitely, demanded certain type of competencies, devotedness

¹⁰ [Fliegstien. 2001: 45],

¹¹ [see ex. Belyaeva. 2010, 2011a, 2011b]

¹² [Kharhordin. 2007b]

and sense of responsibility but most important was the feeling of “connectedness” which made those people feel and act as “one body”.¹³

The ability to cooperate, to assist others, to work for the common good, based on solidarity and mutual trust – these are the qualities of the members of “responsible public”. Since the public is composed of citizens who develop certain qualities (competence, awareness, personal autonomy and care for the community), their involvement in political governance on a regular basis establishes certain social practice, which, by-turn, creates an institution of public participation. Thus, only the active members of the community support and re-create public institutions, such as Governments, electoral rules, etc., or transform them through their actions, which in some cases include destroying old institutions and creating new ones.

Versus the “society at large”, the “active public” possesses a major defining characteristics is: a high (much higher than average) level of caring for community and capability of participating in governance. Members of the “active public” are those who are both willing and capable to:

- Understand the social environment in which they live
- Set up strategic social goals for their community
- Communicate with each other to discuss problems and find solutions
- Put common community benefits as priority to their own ones
- Organize common work for the common good

Role of public in different public policy models

Getting back to the public policy traditions that we have described earlier, and basing our analysis on the actor-institution relations in public policy design, we now want to pose a question – why does it happen that those traditions differ in different regions? What are the conditions that create those traditions or public policy models? To our mind, the reason for this difference is a difference in the estimation of “quality of the public” in those societies and cultures .

What kind of public participation has created the basic political culture we see in the US? Basing our ideas on the evidence of Tocqueville, we can call it “participatory culture”: in most cases the public is competent, educated and active. The citizens in such a culture see their Government as a true “public institution” which “serves the public”, and are able to demand qualified service, which is, in turn, insured by many citizen watch-dog organizations. If over the years democratic institutions (from elections to Government public hearings) function according to the constitution, the court system insures Rule of Law and Government is kept under citizen control, people do create a habit to see their State as an instrument for public policy. And people have no doubt that if they change their beliefs or preferences, through public institutions and representative democracy, media, etc. – they can change public policy and

¹³ [Kharhordin. 2007a]

the character of the Government itself. All of these factors created what we know – in very general terms – as the type of public in America. Moreover, even if such active participation is not made by 100% of citizens, but those 30 or 40% who do participate, are trusted by the other part of society and their decisions would be seen as legitimate. American public, with all the controversies it has, is still pretty consolidated as a nation, which is also proved by not a big number of political parties –just two of them.

The second public policy tradition, which we call European, differs from the American one in the first place by its focus on diversity. It is determined by the alignment of interests and interactions of multiple committees. Commissions hearings, creation of “white books” and “green books” in legislation development on many levels, expert tips, a large number of non-State actors involved in the harmonization of political decision-making - these are the European public space features. In this public space public life is divided to a greater extent and at the same time is more politically structured. We see “well-institutionalized public” with large numbers of actors, multiple negotiation and coordination procedures, and exclusively many political parties. A fairly detailed articulation of specific interests must also be noted, with more than a dozen of leftists parties, and many variations of political nationalists. Thus it is not surprising that public policy tradition in Europe makes an emphasis on the multiplicity of actors.

The third tradition, which we marked as Global, can be characterized by notable shift in focus from actors to the procedures of interests coordination. To our mind, a plausible explanation to this peculiarity may be the fact that at the global level in the process of coordination involves so many actors that their number is simply impossible to take into full account. Moreover, while the process of coordination is already going on, new actors may emerge. The other important peculiarity is that in the global space participating actors may be completely incomparable by their size and weight – on the one hand we have the EU, UN, NATO, WTO and on the other hand - hundreds and thousands of small citizen organizations from different parts of the world, that are effective only if and when they act together on common agenda. Thus, creating a strong agenda is more important, than the names and weight of those organizations which sign it.

But the most interesting phenomenon of making public policy at the global level is the creation of the “global public”. The phenomena discovered by recent research is quite stunning : the most effective actors in the global space turn out to be not “global NGOs” with big budgets, but hundreds of thousands, and millions of individual citizens, who together create the “global public”. By raising concerns and getting involved in campaigns of all kinds (from those aimed at saving environment or preventing slavery and torture to those calling for change in economic conditions for providing development funds to poorer nations), individuals form global citizen alliances. Seeing how citizen agendas are taken on board by global actors, we can confidently say that “global citizens” are becoming an increasingly significant actors in creating the public agenda of global development and making public policy at the global level.

This review allows us to make a preliminary conclusion that the nature of public policy, including its actors, structures and institutions primarily depends on “the quality of public”. There may be hundreds of different types and characteristics of public – active, competent and responsible members of politia (political community) - which depend on territory, national peculiarities or historic traditions. Each country and each level of governance may present very different kind of active public. Jurgen Habermas in his later works reflects on re-feudalization of public space and the emergence of “specific public” in each specific “public domain”, created by the “new information-feudals»¹⁴. But there is always one major cleavage between all cases of public behavior : public may behave as an independent social actor or it can exist as an “audience to be amused”.

Public as an audience

According to the “classical” definition of Habermas, the public sphere is a phenomenon of modern bourgeois society (where “the public” initially referred to attenders of bourgeois salons, who were able to discuss social and political events and publish their views in papers and magazines)¹⁵. It must be noted that although the use of the words “public” and even “public policy” in modern texts has been steadily increasing lately, in most cases “public” still refers to the audience that needs to be entertained. In this context, the Russian word meaning “public” is very different from Aristotle’s definition, or the “classic” meaning, which was confined in the word “Res-publica”. The public in the cities of ancient Greece was a community with several characteristics, primarily related to general co-dependency of life on a common territory. These communities consist of people with shared responsibilities and understanding of the common challenges involved in addressing these issues, people enjoying freedom of thought, will and action. The aggregate of all these qualities gets a “real audience” only when it that wants to and can have an influence on public administration. This classical understanding defines public as an active and responsible part of society which acts on its behalf.

Later on, through development of social and legal science, we have gone rather far from this meaning, and today the concept of public is used more as a theoretical construct, or as an adjective to several important social concepts, like “Public law” or “public space”. Public as a “thing in itself”, as a self-motivated and self-esteemed social actor, had largely disappeared from the political and scientific discourse. Its place had been taken by the “crowd”, or the “masses”, or the “audience”, which acts not on its own will, but is largely manipulated and “organized from the outside». The reason for this conceptual shift is the transformation of society itself, a transformation that came along with post-modernism and its special culture, “mediated” by mass-media.

The emergence of a mass audience (the “target audience” of newspapers, radio, television and finally the audience of the Internet) has completely changed the understanding of the phenomena of

14 [Habermas. 1962].

15 [Habermas1962, 1973].

“public”. In the current world most of the people communicate indirectly, through the media. In this case personal connection, recognition and a sense of community, which was the major characteristic of an “active public, is lost, and people feel being treated as one “big audience”, getting identical “information signals”, but largely separated from each other. Generally in this environment communication is organized “virtually”, even between people from same social or professional group. E.g., someone sees a TV-show, discussing problems and conditions of life similar to their own. People may get emotionally involved in what they see, but it is almost impossible to participate in solving those problems and to share responsibility for the organization of this process. Every television show has its audience, but there is no interaction inside the audience. Hence, the problems are not genuinely discussed, personal and common positions are not formulated, and, most important, there is no shared responsibility.

A related problem is to identify the “public opinion». Public opinion always stumbles on the difficulties of identifying “opinion”, as what is revealed by the polls is not a generalization of the individual meaningful solution, but the result of manifestation of individual will. We can see a “massivization” of samples of public behavior - an imposition of replicable ways of thinking and acting, basically propagated through the media and advertising. A message that “hundreds of thousands of people have chosen this book (listened to this song, watched this film, joined this political party, bought this vacuum cleaner) would mean that “the public has made its choice”, and everyone who is a member of the public should simply follow. This type of “suggesting patterns of behavior” is obviously not limited to choosing consumer goods; everything without exception is being set for “public distribution” - from lifestyle models to stereotypes of social behavior. Modern technology of “marketing networks” create and distribute a certain pattern of behavior, taste, and opinions on a particular issue, an attitude to a political symbol or character. This sample is rapidly spread from one source of information to a wide network: it may be it a newspaper, radio or the Internet. As far as it is positioned as a successful, the model will be regarded as universal, and people will find it difficult to keep from following it. Definition of the modern notion of “public” in dictionaries is also linked to the consumption of information. The public is understood most often as an audience in a hall, a stadium, as viewers, fans etc.

We must admit that these features reflect the realities of our time; they are an inevitable product of mass culture, which makes it incredibly difficult to maintain individuality, not to follow a mass, to keep to a personal opinion. It becomes more difficult to articulate an original view, to express it clearly and to convey it to others in such a convincing way that this opinion could break through the noise of mass phenomena.

In Russia, as in other countries with un-finished democratic transition and weak political culture, the “true public” is yet to be created. The “audience-public” which wants “panem et circenses” is predisposed to any kind of “informational abuse” and manipulation and can easily be “converted” and driven to support authoritarian leaders, aggressive ideologies or other myths, created by skillful propaganda. Only in a few places in Russian regions - especially in small townships and villages – there

are some visible attempts of citizens' efforts of consolidation: a manifestation of "real public" which represents itself in a collective, organized and responsible behavior. It leads to a creation of community-based awareness of their own collective identity, and hence the preservation and reproduction of this identity. If such citizen coalitions are built on common ethical norms or political views, they are able to maintain and reproduce common citizen values and influence a broader community, thus creating a "responsible public" in the initial meaning of the word.

Civil society structures, NGOs and protesting public

The need for the new analytical instruments often comes all of a sudden, when unexpected social events need to be explained and analytical instruments that had been applied in similar situations before turn out to be ineffective.

This is exactly how it happened right after the beginning of the mass public protests in Russia last year. Though similar unexpected situations did occur shortly before (in the Arab World and in post-Soviet Asia), analysts had not yet developed an appropriate framework that could be applied adequately to this new type of mass protest movements.

Many had already forgotten, that about the year before today's democratic and civilized mass movements emerged, Russia had seen a far less civilized spontaneous mass meeting led by right-wing aggressive nationalists, that gathered about 5.000 young nationalists at Manezhnaya square in Moscow, right beside the Kremlin wall. Both the police and the society were shocked, as there was no visible organizer and this aggressive movement was claimed to be the new "fascist face" of civil society. This led many analysts to re-think what is the true meaning of the term "civil society", as the nationalist gathering was clearly falling under all the "classic" definitions : non-governmental, spontaneous, voluntary, almost grass-roots. Researchers have concluded that those people that assembled in reaction on the killing of the Russian-ethnic football fan by a Russian citizen of Dagestani descent were a "special type of public". This public was quickly calmed by the Prime-Minister's promise to punish guilty ones, and dissolved almost instantly.

When almost fifty thousand people took out into the streets of Moscow last December, demanding free and fair elections, analysts immediately called them a "true civil society". But it was not easy to answer what kind of civil society it was, as there were very few NGOs seen as organizers, people were not standing behind a particular political party or an alternative candidate. 80 percent came out to a demonstration for the first time in their lives. Not politicians but those who protesters saw as moral authorities became spokespersons and coordinators - writers, journalists, musicians. None of the political parties or movements has been able to take over leadership. It was a leaderless and very much a grassroots movement; where the Internet and social networks played a key role in organization and mobilization.

Many attempts have been made to somehow define who were all those people, many of whom continued to come out to the following mass protest events, with more and more radical political demands, often risking to be beaten by the police and taken to custody. The protesters were first called “angry citizens” (but this does not give a clear definition to the object of their anger), then they were called a “fur-coat revolution” (but this was not adequate either, as there were many people with quite low income among the protesters), finally they were called a “creative class”, but this also happened to be only part of the truth.

We want to offer our own definition to those mass movements: this was *protesting public*, which behaved as a collective social actor, dissatisfied by the political regime and demanding its change. It is the global tradition which emphasizes public policy in terms of horizontal management links which enable people to work together on common problems and meet global challenges. It appears that the tradition of protest movements is the closest to a global tradition in public policy: people gather together, formulate agenda and conduct public action in order to make their country live in dignity. This tradition has received a conditional name of *collective problem solving* and is now gaining popularity.

A significant number of people are aware of social problems and unite to address them. However, meanwhile it is quite clear that Russian political system runs by its own rules, and there are people who are not satisfied with this system; they live, act, think, and build up their civil and political context outside of it. And these people are not only non-systemic opposition, but also an appreciable proportion of the general population.

Monitoring of mass rallies in Russia in the winter 2011-2012 have clearly shown that this phenomenon has affected a small part of the population, primarily in major metropolitan areas - a clear minority. Many researchers in Russia and abroad have explained the surge of popular participation by the need of a new “social contract” between the authorities and society. However, it would be a dangerous oversimplification to equate this specific protesting public to Russian society as a whole, which largely remains very conservative and does not easily welcome change. Realizing that it was not a question of “society as a whole”, analysts understood the need for a new concept, which could describe the events of “mass political participation”, as well as differentiate “active society” and “civil society” more accurately. It would be tempting to say that the protests were initiated and driven by “civil society”, which is always associated with democratic transit. However, one cannot help but notice that frequent equalization of the concept of “civil society” with a list of public associations has led to an atrophy of the term, its inability to capture the essence of the new phenomenon. Moreover, even a cursory review of sociological features of the mass protest actions shows that it was not voluntary associations and non-profit organizations who suddenly came together on the streets. On the contrary, most of these organizations both in Russia were not responsible for the organization of these events. The participants were a different part of society, differently motivated and organized, a separate phenomenon and type of social actor worth exploring.

There are several analytical techniques which allow us to distinguish the new subject of social action entitled "the audience" of civil society.

- 1) **Space of existence.** *Civil society*, relatively speaking, is not always public; in fact, members of the civil society may "stay at home", while the *protesting public* definitely acts in an open public space (which is always risky). An important feature of outdoor public action is that everyone acts on their own behalf; the actions are visible and equally prone to criticism.
- 2) **Key features of consolidation.** The association of specific actors with the concept "civil society", as well as the agenda and policy of those actors stem largely through public opinion, awareness and attitudes, and thus comes mainly "from the outside". At the same time the public is characterized by its own ability to articulation (e.g., almost everyone had their own poster at the mass protest action on Bolotnaya square). In public we see a subjective unity of consciousness, will and action. All analysts have noted that participants of the winter protest actions were not a crowd, not a manipulated mass: the protest was individual and collective at the same time. The general feature of public actions is *a collective response to a public call*.
- 3) **The reaction to risks.** A possible and frequent reaction of "civil society" organizations to a crisis situation is hiding. Caring for their reputation and political independence, which is at stake, the civil society often avoids risky situations. The public, acting as a community of individuals, has fewer bars to take risks. At risky turning points the needed social action is taken by "protest public". There can be no political development without this active part of society that is ready to risk its own well-being. At the same time such "protest public" is quite fluid and moody; its attitude and willingness for public action is changeable. This is why serious organizational work is required to retain its effective activity and joint understanding of common goals and values. The public is invited to the format of political participation, which enables it to engage in the political system.

Russian protest case study

Let us now look deeper into these notions through the example of Russian protests in the winter 2011-2012. Mass rallies began after the State Duma elections on December 4, 2011 and continued during and after the presidential election campaign. The State Duma elections were accompanied by violations and massive fraud, which particularly outraged thousands of citizens.

Mass actions of protests in Moscow and St. Petersburg began on the evening of 4 December. The first mass rally took place in Moscow December 5th under numerous slogans: "Elections are a farce!",

"Give back the choice to the country!", "Give the power back to people!" Due to quick spread of information in LiveJournal, Twitter and Facebook, the action brought into streets from 2 up to 10 thousand participants. According to the Kommersant and "Vedomosti", journalists, it was the most numerous public meeting in Moscow since 1993. The key demands of the protesters were investigation of electoral fraud and punishment of its organisers and perpetrators, swift adoption of democratic, liberal legislation on political parties and elections, fresh elections to the Duma and of the President in a year from now according to the new rules, release of political prisoners, and – more generally – a comprehensive political reform. People called for a reform of the judicial system, fight against corruption, and ending of government control over the media. Much anger was targeted personally at Putin as a symbol of an authoritarian and corrupted system. As a result of the rally more than 300 people were arrested¹⁶. On December 6th internal troops of Russian military were brought into Moscow¹⁷. On December 10th protests were held in 99 cities in Russia and 42 cities abroad¹⁸. The rally at Bolotnaya square in Moscow became the most massive protest action in the last decade¹⁹ (on other data – the largest since the beginning of 1990-s²⁰). Moscow authorities stated that the rally gathered around 25 thousand people, but according to independent observers and foreign journalists, Bolotnaya brought together over 60 thousand participants²¹.

Two weeks later, on December 24th, a still more massive protest rally took place in Moscow, at Saharov prospect, that was prepared by the Protests Organizing Committee, established after the Bolotnaya rally. Sakharov prospect gathered about 100 000 participants in Moscow; many protest meetings were held same day in other Russian cities. Among the participants of the protest actions supporting demand for the Russian authorities to abolish the controversial elections results was the first President of USSR Mikhail Gorbachev²², and former Minister of Finance Aleksey Kudrin.

In February 2012, there was a new series of mass actions. Again, rallies and marches were held in more than 100 cities in Russia and abroad. The rally on Yakimanka on February 4th gathered from 36 thousand to 120 thousand participants²³. The date was chosen to be timed to the 22th anniversary of the "March of the Democratic Forces" in 1990, which initiated a mass protest of citizens against the socialist regime. At the end of February and in March 2012, the mass protests continued, once more bringing together hundreds of thousands of people all across Russia. On March 5th - the day after the election of the President – a protest rally took place in Moscow with the number of participants ranging from 14 to 30 thousand people, and on March 10th Moscow saw two significant protest actions, each of them

¹⁶ <http://www.ria.ru/incidents/20111205/507566861.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2011/12/06/focus/562949982225251>

¹⁸ <http://lenta.ru/articles/2011/12/10/worldprotest/>

¹⁹ <http://kpravda.com/oppozicionnyj-miting-v-moskve-stal-samym-massovym-za-poslednee-desyatiletie/>

²⁰ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2011/12/protest-russia-0>

²¹ http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/elections2011/2011/12/10_a_3922210.shtml

²² <http://lenta.ru/news/2011/12/25/gorbachev/>

²³ http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lastnews/2012/02/04/n_2191809.shtml

gathering from 10 to 30 thousand people²⁴. Rally at Pushkin square was broken up by riot police, and on the same day, a non-authorized action of the "The Other Russia" party was dispersed by police at the Lubyanka square in Moscow and in Petersburg. On March 7th and 18th there were series of unauthorized actions in support of political prisoners and against the provocative lie of NTV channel which had broadcasted a film, which blamed the opposition for allegedly organizing the protests under USA State Department funding. Mass protest rallies were held in many Russian cities. A table below shows the complete list of cities in Russia, where sizable protests were held, and the number of their participants.

City	Region	Participants	Date
Moscow	Central Federal District	150 000 ²⁵	February, 4
Saint-Petersburg	North-West Federal District	25 000 ²⁶	February, 25
Ekaterinburg	Urals federal district	10 000 ²⁷	December, 10
Novosibirsk	Siberian Federal District	6000 ²⁸	December, 10
Tomsk	Siberian Federal District	4000 ²⁹	December, 10
Samara	Volga Federal District	4000 ³⁰	December, 24
Ekaterinburg	Urals federal district	2000 ³¹	March, 5
Arkhangelsk	North-West Federal District	2000 ³²	December, 10
Volgograd	Southern Federal District	2000 ³³	December, 10
Chelyabinsk	Urals federal district	2000 ³⁴	December, 10
Ijevsk	Volga Federal District	2000 ³⁵	December, 18
Perm	Volga Federal District	2000 ³⁶	December, 24

²⁴ <http://www.rg.ru/2012/03/05/pushka.html>

²⁵ <http://grani.ru/Politics/Russia/activism/m.193917.html>

²⁶ <http://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=4F48D5E72717B>

²⁷ <http://www.66.ru/news/society/108546/>

²⁸ <http://metkere.com/2011/12/10dec.html>

²⁹ <http://www.tv2.tomsk.ru/news/v-tomske-proidet-limiting-protiv-falsifikatsii-vyborovl>

³⁰ <http://kp.ru/daily/25809/2789303>

³¹ <http://www.nr2.ru/ekb/376261.html>

³² <http://www.rosbalt.ru/federal/2011/12/10/922885.html>

³³ <http://www.rosbalt.ru/federal/2011/12/12/923316.html>

³⁴ <http://www.russian.rfi.fr/node/79001>

³⁵ <http://www.dayudm.ru/news/2011/12/12/51110/>

³⁶ <http://www.echo.perm.ru/news/20/31927/>

Barnaul	Siberian Federal District	1500 ³⁷	December, 10
Krasnodar	Southern Federal District	1500 ³⁸	December, 10
Tyumen	Urals federal district	1500 ³⁹	December, 10
Kaliningrad	North-West Federal District	1000 ⁴⁰	December, 7
Vladivostok	Far-East Federal District	1000 ⁴¹	December, 10
Vologda	North-West Federal District	1000 ⁴²	December, 10
Ufa	Volga Federal District	1000 ⁴³	December, 10
Kazan	Volga Federal District	1000 ⁴⁴	December, 24

An Organizational Committee, established at the first rally to prepare the following protest actions, included: Boris Akunin (writer), Leonid Parfenov (TV-journalist and producer), Sergey Parkhomenko (Radio-journalist and publisher), Vladimir Ryzhkov (leader of the banned Republican party), Alexei Navalny (leader of an anti-corruption web-project “Ros-Pil”), Gennady Gudkov (Deputy of the State Duma from party “Just Russia”), Anastasia Udaltsova (Left Front activist), Dmitry Bykov (poet and journalist), Yelena Lukyanova (Professor of Moscow State University, attorney at law for case of YUKOS), Oleg Kashin (journalist), Yuri Saprykin (Chief Editor of the Internet publication Slon. Ru), Olga Romanova (TV journalist REN TV). The Organizing Committee has met several times, including the sessions, that were broadcasted publicly through the Internet. Decisions were taken on various organizational issues: composition of the speakers at the rally, sources of finance, organizational costs (installation, equipment, rent monitors for video presentations), the substantive items of the draft resolutions to be adopted at the rally, security issues, participation of the moderators in social networks. List of speakers at the rally was put under public vote in the Internet and represented a full spectrum of the protest movement. To cover the meeting costs organizers used the method of “crowd funding”, that allowed them to collect 3 million rubles in less than a week. The task of collecting donations via the Internet was given to journalist Olga Romanova, who opened an electronic “cash-box, so that anyone

³⁷ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1836250?stamp=634591573290349891>

³⁸ http://www.dg-yug.ru/a/2011/12/10/Miting_proshel_v_Krasnodare

³⁹ <http://www.nashgorod.ru/news/news47147.html>

⁴⁰ <http://www.newsru.com/russia/07dec2011/kaliningr.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1836092?stamp=634591087510046946>

⁴² <http://xn--b1aefabadrc0ci1do.xn--p1ai/archives/6585>

⁴³ <http://ria.ru/society/20111210/512346671.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.itar-tass.com/c12/305770.html>

could contribute any amount. The journalist posted all the scanned documents evidencing the committed transactions. Approximately 18 million roubles had been collected for the protest actions in period two months.

More than 400 known Russian actors and public persons, as well as writers, poets, scientists and journalists had signed an Appeal to citizens with an invitation to participate in the protest meetings, many of them recorded series of video-appeals which were broadcasted on the Internet. A dozen of informal groups was created to help the Organizational Committee, joined by hundreds of volunteers, including students, businessmen, school teachers and university professors, who created, designed and distributed organizing materials, spread stickers, posters and slogans.

A deep sociological study has been conducted two research centers: Social Research Fund of Samara and the Centre for the study of social processes of Leonid Kesselman in St. Petersburg. According to the survey, 46% of Moscovites supported the protests, and 25% opposed them. 73 % of the protesters demanded to punish all perpetrators of electoral fraud and 71% stood for investigation of the irregularities in the elections. The results of a Public Opinion Foundation survey, held in mid-December, the demand to cancel the results of the elections and to hold a new fair vote was supported by 26% Russians, 40% stood for re-election of the Parliament, and only 6% of respondents believed that the elections passed without cheating⁴⁵. According to the poll, on the eve of the rally in December it had no less than 150 thousand supporters in Moscow.

What can be viewed as primary results of the rallies came shortly. On December 15th President-elect and still a Prime-Minister Vladimir Putin announced the return for the elections of the Governors in the coming year of 2012. On 22 December in his annual address to the Federal Assembly President Dmitry Medvedev said: "I hear those who speak of the need for change, and understand them". The President said that he proposed "comprehensive reform of our political system". A simplified procedure for registration of political parties was introduced through a Federal Law, so that parties could be created upon request of 500 people representing it not less than 50 per cent of the regions of the country). The need to collect signatures to participate in the elections to the State Duma and regional legislative bodies was cancelled for the parties already represented in Duma, and for the non-represented parties their number was reduced. On of December 23rd the Presidential Council on the development of civil society and human rights expressed their distrust to the head of the Central Electoral Commission Vladimir Churov and asked him to resign⁴⁶. On December 27th Vladislav Surkov, according to presidential decree was dismissed from the post of Deputy Head of Administration.

Certainly these actions were only a quick reaction, and real political change and systematical reforms have not followed. Nevertheless, these events show that the government was forced to react to public actions. In the last few months we have seen a new spin of tightening the grip in newly adopted

⁴⁵ <http://newsru.com/russia/22dec2011/quarter.html>

⁴⁶ <http://kremlin.ru/news/14088>

anti-NGO legislation, new prosecutions and arrests of oppositional activists, and politically motivated trials. But what is more important for our studies, the protesting public, though having experienced many inevitable conflicts and controversies within itself due to the difference in interests and positions of its members, is still becoming more consolidated and structured, through elections to the Coordination Council of the Russian opposition movement held in October 2012 and ongoing activities.

Returning to our main goal – defining the protesting public – let us turn once again to results of sociological research based on the results of exit polls on the Moscow winter rallies.

Exit polls at the rally at Sakharov prospect December 24th 2011 (600 persons)⁴⁷

Tab. 2. Your gender? (one reply)

Male	64
Female	36

Tab. 3. Age of respondent (one reply)

18-24 years	17
25-34 years	24
35-44 years	21
45-59 years	24
above 60	13

Tab. 4. Your education? (one reply)

Primary and lower secondary	7
Secondary general schools	9
Secondary special education	13
Higher	70

Tab. 5. What is your primary occupation? (one reply)

Skilled worker	2
Unskilled worker	11
Employees without higher education	3
Specialist with higher education in the commercial sector	44
Specialist with higher education (Government – funded social work)	5
Soldier in the army, internal affairs, including police	2

⁴⁷ ВЦИОМ, Опрос участников митинга 24 декабря 2012 г., г. Москва, пр-т Сахарова, объем выборки – 600 чел.

Businessman	5
State or municipal employee	2
Pensioner	10
On on maternity leave	2
Student	10
Other	2
Difficult to answer	1

Tab.6 Evaluate your financial situation (one reply)

Very good	5
Good	29
Average	56
Bad	9
Very bad answer	0
Difficult to answer	0

Tab.7. What slogans at the rally do you like most?

Free, fair and honest elections!	37
Down With Putin	25
Cancel, review the results of the elections	19
Down with Churov (Chair of the Russian Central Electoral Commission)	9
Down with crooks and thieves / corrupt liars	7
Putin – thief, jail him	6
Change of Governmentand political system	5
We are not slaves	4
Freedom for political prisoners	3
Russia will be free	3

Exit polls at the rally at Bolotnaya square February 4th (800 persons)⁴⁸.

Tab. 8. Your gender? (one reply)

Male	71
Female	29

⁴⁸ ВЦИОМ. Опрос на выходе участников шествия и митинга на Болотной набережной
4.02.2012. г. Объем выборки - 800, шаг отбора - 5.

Tab. 9. Age of respondent (one reply)

18-24 years	20
25-34 years	28
35-44 years	23
45-59 years	20
60 and over	10

Tab. 10. Your education? (one reply)

Primary and lower secondary	3
Secondary general schools	15
Secondary special education	26
Higher	56

Tab. 11. What is your primary occupation? (one reply)

Worker	11
Soldier in the army, internal affairs agencies, including police, FSB	2
Businessman	5
Public servant, an employee of administrative bodies	12
Engineer, technical specialists	10
Office employee	18
Government – funded social work (a doctor, social worker, teacher)	7
Artistic professions	4
Unemployed	1
Student	8
Pensioneer	9
Housekeeper	3
Other	3
Difficult to answer	4

Tab.12 Evaluate your financial situation (one reply)

Very good	1
Good	26
Average	59
Bad	11
Very bad	2
Difficult to answer	1

Tab.13. **What slogans at the rally do you like most? (open question, any number of answers)**

Down with Putin, Russia without Putin, Vova get out	47
Free, fair and honest elections!	16
The change of Government and political system	5
Down with crooks and thieves / corrupt liars	4
Freedom for political prisoners	2
Power to the people	2
Russia will be free	2
The power for millions	2
Down with Churov (Chair of the Russian Central Electoral Commission)	1
The will of the people, law, freedom	1

These results provide some characteristics of the “qualities” of this public as a social actor. First important characteristic, that all the attempts to find a “specific social group” behind the protests is impossible: the protesters represent all genders, ages, professions and social strata. This shows a remarkable diversity of participants and allows to call those actions a real “broad social protest”. Other “special qualities” of Moscow protest public were the following:

- exclusively peaceful protest, totally non-aggressive in attitude;
- very well organized - both by public protests Committee and by Moscow police (the largest mass actions were officially “sanctioned” by Moscow authorities);
- very creative, full of funny, humorous and sarcastic messages, critical to power;
- very well articulated messages - both personalized (every 5-th one with own slogan) but also developing the same common idea - a call for the change of power and empowering the people.

Interestingly enough, in many recent works on social movements and mass protests much attention is given to self-identity of the protesters and creating the “identification through the protest actions. We also see this in Russian “Snow Revolution” in 2011-2012 and in several other cases of spontaneous mass protests - in Ukraine and in Belarus - first comes action itself, then - reflection and identification with conscious protest movement, as Karic Kleman brightly points out in her book: *“from ordinary people to activists”*.

We want to conclude with returning to our initial question: how do we move from viewing public “as an audience” to public “as a social actor”. Currently see it happening right in front of us, it is our duty to document it thoroughly and honestly, trying to grasp the very moment of the “turning point”, to identify both its “conditions” and its “triggers”. This would be, definitely, the task for further studies; seeing that the “protesting public” has not faded away and disappeared from public space. We hope to see and study the development of this “collective social actor”.

We should realize the risk of the protest public turning back into “ordinary citizens”, as the protest activity can never keep the same level of passion for too long, especially when authorities deliberately ignore their demands, organizing counterdemonstrations and public actions in support of present regime, as has happened and still happens in Russia. So we may see rapid shrinking and, possibly, total disappearance of the mass protest actions in the streets of Moscow, Saint-Petersburg or Voronezh, but it poses even more interesting research question to our over-all goal to “re-define the public”:

Would this ever be the SAME public, that existed BEFORE those mass actions? Or, instead, Is this experience in participating mass and lasting protest is creating NEW QUALITY of public, that would behave differently in any other social interactions, particularly , vis-à-vis government authorities, corrupted bureaucracies, inadequate government structures?

Our hypothesis, grounded in social actor theories suggests that this would probably become a completely different kind of public, that would be able to transfer the whole public space, by gradually demanding more transparency, accountability and effectiveness - from both private and public actors, be them Presidents, local officials or Global companies.

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