Jolanta Aidukaitė

Community Mobilizations Around Housing and Local Environment: Insights into the Case of Vilnius

Abstract. *This paper reviews activities of community organizations in the post–Soviet city of Vilnius. The particular attention is paid to the reasons for mobilization of the local communities; the leadership and motivation; the reasons for non–participation; and the communication with the local authorities. The findings of this paper show that mobilizations are not taking place on the massive scale. However, they are being institutionalized and have achieved noteworthy results. Communities mobilize against illegal or unwanted constructions close to their vicinity or to defend green zones in the city. The successful movement is centered around a charismatic leader who devotes his/her time and non–material and material resources to attain results. The explanations for non–participation can be found in difficult economical conditions of the majority of the population; low level of civil society; increasing individualization and income inequalities. The findings of this paper also demonstrate that the political and institutional structure is fairly unfavorable for local activists. The community organizations are not supported by the local governmental structures in a substantial way. On the contrary, they are faced, in most of the cases, with the authority's alienation and confrontation.*

Keywords: *community organizations, Vilnius, urban movements, post–Soviet city, urban policy, Lithuania.*

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: *bendruomeninės organizacijos; Vilnius, socialiniai judėjimai; posovietinis miestas; miesto politika; Lietuva.*

1. Introduction

The major problem since the fall of the communist regime has been the liberalization of housing and urban policies allowing market forces to take almost full responsibility for it (Balchin 1996). The changes are especially pronounced in cities, as they have moved away from the state control and long-term planning towards the market city model based on private ownership and limited state control over the land property and housing markets (Tosics 2005). This has been accompanied by such problems as inadequate state policies and legislation, policies in favor of new construction, lack of experience in public-private partnerships, etc. (Balchin 1996; Polanska 2011; Tshenkova 2009). Vilnius is no exception to this situation. Problems associated with housing management issues,

sustainability and environmental issues are at the forefront in Vilnius (Leonavičius and Žilys 2009; Petkevičius 2005). Nowadays, some community organizations and Green movements bring up housing and local environmental issues in the public debate. However, very few studies (e.g. Bražiūnaitė 2005; Nefas 2006) explore community organizations and their impact on housing policy and local environment in Vilnius.

The aim of this paper is to explore urban mobilizations in the field of housing and local environment in the city of Vilnius. Specifically, it explores mobilizations at the community level, which involve environmental issues and strives to improve the community's infrastructure, safety and housing conditions. The attention will be paid to the scope and reasons for mobilization of the local communities; the leadership and motivation; the reasons for nonparticipation; the communication with state authorities and attempts to form alliances.

In a broader context, the paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of how civil society attempts to shape housing policies and urban environment in the context of rapid state's withdrawal from the direct intervention in the housing sector and residualization of public housing and urban policies (Tsenkova 2009).

This paper adopts the generic usage of the concept of urban social movement, as discussed by Pickvance (2003), which means that any organized actions of citizens, which seek to bring a change, are referred as social movements irrespective of their actual effects on housing or urban policy. The movement which achieves desired outcomes is referred as a 'successful movement' in this study.

The paper employs a qualitative approach to study community organizations in Vilnius. The 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders (20), the Vilnius Municipality official, the president of the **Union of Local Community Organi-**zations of Lithuania**, the Vilnius Communi**ties' Association leader and the Lithuanian Green movement. The total 24 interviews provide a rich material for understanding community mobilizations and their problems. The analysis of interviews has passed through all stages of the qualitative analytical process as described by Meuser and Nagel (2009, 35): transcription, paraphrase, coding, thematic comparison, sociological conceptualization, theoretical generalization. The paper displays two final stages of the analysis. The specific characteristics of commonly shared knowledge of the expert interviews are condensed, categorized and the findings are empirically generalized displaying the most illustrative quotes.

The paper will be organized as follows. First, a short discussion on civil activism in post-communist countries and civil society in Lithuania will be provided. Second, the description of the major changes that post-communist cities have experienced over the last two decades of transition will be presented. This will be followed by some information on the city of Vilnius. Then, some background information on community organizations in Vilnius will be provided. Finally, the analysis of 25 semi-structured interviews will be offered.

2. Civil activism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Lithuania

Civil activism in the CEE is explained by two major factors: economic opportunities and historical legacies (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). The economic opportunities are understood as availability of local or external donor's funds, which help to promote civil activism and achieve results. The historical legacies are understood as destructive influences of the socialist state on the relationship between the state and its people, which were totalitarian, paternalistic and repressive in its nature, leaving little initiative from the grassroots levels to influence the state's decisions. These legacies help to explain the current state of civil society in many post-communist countries up to now. The institutional structures which help to support and promote civil initiatives at the grassroots level are still not in place in some Central and East European countries or not sufficiently developed, which impede the expansion of civil society (Žiliukaitė et al 2006).

Others state (Pickvance 1997) that political context and the degree of the democratization in the Central and Eastern Europe are the most important keys in understanding success and failure of social movements and various civil initiatives. The differences in political context influence the resource availability opportunities and the degree of media support, which in turn can explain the success and failure of the movements in achieving their goals.

The development of various grassroots mobilizations and associations in Lithuania,

as in many post-communist countries, is shaped by two factors. On the one hand, the negative experience of the totalitarian communist regime hinders the expansion of civil society, since any democratic movements were forbidden in the Soviet era. There was no possibility during Soviet time to use citizenship rights to influence the public sphere (the decisions were taken exclusively by the Communist Party and government) as it was in the democratic countries, but instead people formed kinship and friendship networks in a private sphere to form mutual self-help communities. These legacies are visible up to now (Žiliukaitė et al, 2006). On the other hand, the transition that followed by the rapid globalization and Europeanization has opened wide opportunities for the development of various social movements and interest groups. However, civil activism in Lithuania has been lower than in Western Europe (see Pettai, Auers and Ramoniene 2011; Žiliukaitė et al, 2006). Previous studies indicate that various social movements in Lithuania are scarce in terms of their number and scope of activities. Probably the only new social movements that are visible in Lithuania are the Lithuanian Green Movement and feminist 'Lithuanian women's movement' (Paulauskas 2004). The effects of Europeanization in Lithuania, as one of the new EU countries, are especially obvious as it comes to the opening of political opportunity structures for such marginalized groups as sexual minorities, disabled, women, ethnic minorities. Some of those domestic civil society organizations are dependent on the EU funding and sup-

port. To date, there are very few studies on urban and housing movements and activism in Lithuania, which mainly focus on movements around the question of restitution of housing property (see Bražiūnaitė 2005).

3. Post-communist cities

The post-communist cities are interesting examples to study the development of housing, urban policy and planning. They have experienced the rule of the communist regime, which has left its mark on the architectural styles, quality of housing and urban infrastructure of the city. The shift towards western culture and values after the collapse of the communist regimes is reflected in the outlook of the post-communist cities. Within a period of 20 years, the urban structure of cities of Central and Eastern Europe has become more similar to the ones that exist in western cities and has moved away from the communist city model. This is not surprising since the 'urban structure and morphology depends on the political, socio-economic, and cultural characteristics of a particular society' (Pichler-Milanovich 1997; 32).

In the communist city model, the influence of market forces on urban development and housing was formally abolished. The land and property markets were nationalized. As pointed out by Tosics (2005), the housing and construction policy was completely subordinate to a centralized, party-ruled, planned economic system and communist state that regarded housing and construction policy as a matter of politics. It is also important to stress that the goal of the communist planning was to eliminate class or income differences in housing allocation and quality. Housing had become almost the exclusive responsibility of the state. New residential areas were built during the Soviet era in the suburban areas of the cities. These residential areas had the convenient infrastructure with the schools, shops, health care services and the day-care center for preschool children located within the neighborhood. However, the quality of housing was poor (in particular for those built during the 1970s) and apartments were small in size. The housing was cheap and heavily subsidized by the state. It is possible to claim that during the communist era the residential segregation was almost abolished. Although some differences still existed, e.g. housing for the Soviet nomenclature and other elite, the communist urban planning policy, nevertheless, was reflected in the increased equality with regard to the housing.

To sum up, the central urban planning based on the Communist ideology that seeks to equalize the differences between territorial units and also classes, and which was followed by rapid industrialization, has left its mark on the urban structure of the post-communist cities, most visibly a neglected historical part of the cities and a formation of suburban zones with low-quality block housing, which never went through any major rehabilitation (Aidukaite, 2009; 20).

The collapse of the communist regime has opened the way for a new area of city developments in the CEE. Within the 20-year transformation period not only have the local political, economic and social

forces influenced the development of the cities, but cities have also been opened up to the wider influence of globalization and Europeanization. As stated by Tosics (2005), the processes of democratization, decentralization and privatization were responsible for the destruction of the communist city development model. As a consequence of this, 'the role of state control and long-term planning decreased in all transitional countries, and totally new, more market-related actors (landlords, landowners, enterprises, financial institutions) emerged as important decision-makers' (ibid., 58). The role of the large cities, especially the capitals, has increased considerably as major power centers, since they have generated a lot of political power.

Overall, the cities moved away from the communist model based on state control and long-term planning towards the market city model based on private ownership and limited state control over the land property and housing markets. This has greatly affected the outlook of the cities. Perhaps most visible is the increasing differences between various parts of the city. The income and class disparities now are more visible in the housing allocation and residential segregation than it was twenty years ago (Aidukaite, 2009; 20).

4. The case of Vilnius

Vilnius is an example of the post-socialist city with its legacies inherited from the pre-socialist and socialist periods. Vilnius had been already an established trade center and the residential center of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1323 and it was a first Lithuanian town granted Magedburg Law (1387). The Magdeburg law spread through imperial German towns during the 12th century and later on into Bohemia, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania. In Lithuania Magdeburg law had guaranteed an urban autonomy based on the administrative, legal and economic protections (Vareikis 1997). Thus, the history of Vilnius was shaped by the cultural, political and economic influences that were coming from both the West and East. Therefore, Vilnius, as other Baltic capitals (Riga and Tallinn), is often presented as a city with a Western style heritage and culture, or as a bridge between East and West (Aberg and Peterson 1997).

There are very few studies, which describe housing and urban policy in Lithuania before the Second World War. Studies (Gerdvilis 2007; Kiškienė 2011) state that at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century the ideas of cheap, rental apartment type housing were spreading rapidly in Vilnius, likewise as it was in Russia and the rest of Europe. These ideas were new and born in the era of the industrial revolution. The housing colonies started to be built in Vilnius, which provided house or apartment for families of the same social status/class, which could share not only common residence, but also common interests.

After the Second World War Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Union and was a subject to the same socialist urban planning regulations as the whole country. During Soviet time Lithuanian society has become urbanized: in 1970 urban popula-

tion accounted for 50% (Leonavičius and Žilys 2009), while before Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Union, it was a mainly agrarian society with its 76 % of the population living in a countryside (Aidukaitė, Bogdanova and Guogis 2012). At present 66 percent of the inhabitants are living in urban areas, 33.1 percent – in the rural ones (Lietuvos Statistikos Departamentas 2011; 37).

Another particularly important feature as pointed by Leonavičius and Žilys (2009; 318) of the Soviet system - the comprehensive ideologisation, seeking to erase all symbols and meanings of earlier periods of urban development. The Soviet society was 'a society of shortages' and its gray architecture and faulty construction provided an evidence of it. Apartment blocks build with the panel technology were a political reflection of the state's ideology (Gerdvilis 2007). However, housing shortage was a common feature of Soviet economy and this resulted in fast, but poor quality housing construction, which sought to meet increasing housing demands (Leonavičius and Žilys 2009).

As was noted, the central urban planning, based on the socialist ideology which strived to equalize the differences between territorial units, lasting 50 years, left its visible signs. The most evident of this was a neglected historical part of the city and a suburban zone formation with the low quality of housing built with the panel technology in the 1970s, which were deteriorating and never went through any major rehabilitation (Tosics 2005). Nowadays, Vilnius has to deal with all problems of the post-socialist city. The negative features were particularly visible in the central area of the historical part of the city since many buildings were left to decay. The historical part was quickly rebuilt after restoration of independence in 1990. However, the apartment blocks build in 1970's still need a substantial reconstruction.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and subsequently the privatization of the economy have brought new problems to the city and into ordinary people's lives. According to Pichler-Milanovich (1997), the transition from planned to market economy has involved great practical difficulties and enormous hardship for many people. Since 1990 there has been an absolute loss of population due to emigration and low birth rates in many Baltic cities. The rapid depopulation and deindustrialization of Lithuanian society after the collapse of the Soviet Union has created the situation where in the city statistically each year residents have more and more useful floor area (Leonavičius and Žilys 2009). The average useful floor area per capita in 2010 amounted to 26,1, in urban areas – 24,8, in rural areas – 28.9 m². The useful floor area per capita in Vilnius city amounted to 25.5 m² (Lietuvos Statistikos Departamentas 2011; 199). Although, the average floor area is increasing, this is still relatively low compared with other EU countries. For instance, in Sweden in 2009 useful floor area per capita was 45,2 m², in Germany – 42,9 m², in Estonia – 29,7 m², in the United Kingdom – 44 m² (Dol and Haffner 2010; 51). The observers (Leonavičius and Žilys 2009; 324), however,

predict that while maintaining such social and demographic trends (increasing emigration, depopulation due to rapid ageing and low fertility rates) there will not be 'mass production' of housing in Lithuania in the future. Instead, the Lithuanian state's and business's interests will be concerned with the maintenance of existing housing stock ensuring their quality and meeting housing needs for different social groups. Meeting the needs of the young families which have better opportunities to take a mortgage for the longest period will be at the centre of housing policy in the years to come.

At present Vilnius is a modern city with the 554 000 of the inhabitants (Lietuvos Statistikos Departamentas 2011). The city has all legacies of a Soviet-era industrial town, but new global forces have been also shaping the outlook of Vilnius. Currently, most foreign investments are located in the capital cities of the Baltic States, since they provide an attractive location offering a well-educated labour force. It gives the Baltic republics a strong initial competitive advantage over other transitional countries (Pichler-Milanovich 1997). Vilnius is a cultural centre, but also political and economic entity, which generates the most wealth and investments in the region.

5. Community organizations in Vilnius

At present, there are 26 active community organizations (*bendruomeninė organizacija*) in Vilnius that have become impor-

tant agents in promoting self-governance at the grassroots level and encourage taking initiative to bring various community issues to the decision-making level. In 2010, there was established the **Union of Local Community Organizations of Lithuania**, which within one year of existence has achieved significant results: the cooperation agreement was signed with the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, a national community development program was approved, and an opportunity to communicate directly with the Parliament (Seimas) and the Government representatives was established[1]. The community organizations in Vilnius promote community care, policies of reducing social exclusion, they take care of infrastructure support in the neighborhood and solve various environmental issues. Although their activities are still quite weak, there are interesting examples of how some community organizations have managed to achieve successful results in solving their problems and bringing up their issues to the decision-making level.

In the following discussion we will analyze the activities of the community organizations in a more detail.

6. Analysis of 24 in-depth interviews

6.1. Reasons for mobilization of local communities

Interviews revealed that there are three types of community organizations in Vilnius. The first type of community organi-

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[1] http://www.kbca.lt/pages/apie_kbca.

zations is formed from below. Such communities are formed because of the need to defend themselves against illegal construction and to solve environmental issues in the neighborhood as the government does not provide any assistance. Usually, such community organizations are not supported from above, their resources are scarce and they survive on members' donations or 2 % of income tax redirection. Some of these organizations 'disappear' as soon as they reach their goals. Others continue to perform other social and cultural functions and become visible in the political arena only if new problems that need to be solved arise. The activities of the first type of community organizations will be discussed in more detail shortly.

The second type of community organizations is formed from above. They are established on the initiative of the municipality and the mayor of Vilnius and supported by the district[2] (*seniūnija*). On the one hand, the initiative to establish a community organization from above was grounded on the idea of 'best practice', which sprang from the EU, where community organizations are supported by municipalities and the state, and they take an important place in the process of self-government. Nevertheless, the interviewees reported another less obvious reason for supporting the establishment of certain community organizations from above. The community leaders who formed their community organizations at the grassroots level report that the grassroots

community organizations are not welcomed by the municipality. Therefore, the municipality started establishing community organizations which would be subordinate to the interests of the municipality and perform non-political activities such as various cultural, social gatherings etc.

The third type of community organizations is formed in order to utilize the EU money through the European Structural Fund, which is devoted to community building. Usually, such communities are also encouraged from above by the municipality and district. The *Viršuliškės* community organization was formed this way. It was established in 2007 based on the stimulus to receive the EU money to renovate the community center facilities. They received approximately 270 thousand LTL (78 thousand euro) and successfully renovated the centre of the community. At the present time, the centre is used for various gatherings: political, housing self-management partnerships' meetings; the police come to give lectures to the members of the community. Since the leader of the *Vir uliškės* community organization is a construction worker, the community's main function is the development of infrastructure. The community survives on the financing which comes from the EU projects and 2 percent income tax redirection.

The second and third type of community organizations do not experience confrontation with the local authorities, whereas the first type of community organizations,

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[2] District is an establieshment subordinated to the municipality. There are 21 districts in Vilnius.

as noted, is often perceived negatively by the officials of the state: "*It seems that communities tend to pursue political 'orders'. The Lazdynai community has its own slogans and catch-phrases. The Žvėrynas community is struggling with something again … with oligarchs and with constructions that can destroy the view to the river Neris and something else…* ". The state official expresses a very negative view on two community organizations which were formed from below. The two mentioned communities (Lazdynai and Žvėrynas) are built on the grassroots activism. In the Lazdynai community, residents have been fighting against a proposed project of the waste treatment plant in their vicinity. This has caused not only litigation at the Lithuanian Supreme Administrative Court but also initiated appeals to the President, the Parliament and influential public figures[3]. As a result, the construction of the waste plant has been currently 'frozen'. The *Žvėrynas* community organization is very active and was established from below. The community has been active for about ten years. They have been fighting various illegal constructions which take close to their neighborhood. To defend common interests, the community mainly pursues such legal strategy as litigation in court. They won almost all cases within a period of 10 years. One litigation case against illegal construction that would have taken place close to a monument of architectural heritage – the mill that was constructed during the 16th

century – went as far as the European Commission and the Constitutional Court of Lithuania. The community organization is not supported by the district or municipality. They mainly live on their own donations or must rely on the EU financing through various projects.

Other vivid examples of the grassroots community mobilization are centered on environmental issues. One example is the *Pilaitė* community. It evolved from the bottom in order to oppose construction of a golf course, which included a plan to clear 120 hectares of forest area. The movement against the construction of the golf course merged into a community organization. The activists have collected signatures, went to meetings with officials, asked for help from the Green Movement and closely cooperated with the leader of the Green Movement. When the goal was achieved – the construction of the golf course was stopped – the community 'disappeared' in a sense that it has not been visible at the political level. Some of the most active members have become members of the Green Movement.

The *Žirmūnai* and *Gerosios Vilties* community organizations were established in a similar way. Both of them were established in order to defend large green zones in the city, which serve as important recreational areas for inhabitants of Vilnius. In the *Žirmūnai* neighbourhood, there were intentions to build a baseball stadium and to demolish the recreational area close to the

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[3]   The leader of the Lazdynai community organization refused to take part in our project. Therefore, we base our information on newspaper articles, but also other community organizations' leaders were mentioning the activities of the Lazdynai community organization.

river Neris, where there is a popular bicycle route. The neighbourhood activists pursued the strategies common for all communities: collected signatures, sent letters and appeals to officials and to the Ministry of Environment, went to meetings with the mayor of Vilnius, contacted the leader of the Green Movement, who, in order to solve the case, cooperated with the *Žirmūnai* community leader. The construction of the baseball stadium was stopped. However, some trees were cut off. The *Gerosios Vilties*[4] community was pursuing similar strategies and also defended a large area of the park, which was intended to be used for the construction of luxury apartments. There are other community associations that managed to resist privatization of public property in their neighbourhoods. Thus, forest and parks were preserved with the help of activists in *Žirmunai*, *Gerosios Vilties* and also *Baltupiai* and *Pilaite* neighborhoods.

In all the cases discussed above, the private interests of investors were raised above the interests of common people.

6.2. Leadership and motivation

All community organizations rely on charismatic[5] leadership. The leaders interviewed in this study were mainly middle-aged (very few of them were of retirement age and one young person of the age of 27)

and highly educated people. Many of them have been active their whole lives and even come from families where social activism has always been valued and present. The educational or professional background of the leaders is an important element that determines which areas in the community building will be emphasized and which strategies will be used to pursue the goals of the community. The leaders of *Justiniškės* and *Grigiškės* community organizations actively pursue organization of environmental campaigns because both of them are very concerned with environmental issues and have a background in environmental protection. The leader of the *Baltupiai* community organization is a former teacher. Therefore, she is very active in promoting various interest clubs and after school activities for children. It is also worth mentioning that in her campaign to defend the *Jomantas* Park from deforestation, she organized a protest action which included active participation of school children. The leader of the *Viršuliškės* community promotes various infrastructure development projects because his background is in the construction industry. Community leaders who come from the artistic background promote cultural events in their neighbourhood, building sculptures and putting effort to preserve cultural monuments from the decay. Obviously, in many cases the leadership in the community is an

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[4] The *Gerosios Vilties* community organization leader was not interviewed in this study, because he recently passed away. However, almost every community association leader interviewed has mentioned about Gerosios Vilties community organization activities as an outstanding example.

[5] Charismatic leadership refers to such qualities: strong interpersonal skills, ability to influence and get things done, and strong motivation to work for the community.

expression of one's own identity. In many cases the leaders use their own material resources and sacrifice their personal life to promote the activities of the community.

The majority of the leaders explain their activism by their internal state of being, by their human nature. "*I am a patriot of Lithuania. I feel like this is my problem. I love people, especially people who live in my community. Such people are always going to exist. If there were no such people, this world would not stand… no longer* (the leader of the *Grigiškės* community organization)." "*It feels so good to know that I made or done something that other people can enjoy and experience too. I want people to feel that it is good to live on this earth and that people come to this world for a purpose...*" (the leader of the *Balsiai* community organization). "*If I came to this world, I have to tidy my backyard*" (the leader of the *Salininkai* community organization). "*I am a civic man who actively participates everywhere and all the time...*" (the leader of the *Žvėrynas* community organization).

The analyses of the interviews allow to state that communities, especially those who are very active, are centered on a charismatic leader and if the leader would for some reason resign, the community's activities might be cancelled, since it would be difficult, if possible at all, to find a replacement for the leader. This assumption probably will not be applicable to the communities which were built at the grassroots level. However, the assumption definitely precisely describes other communities, especially those which were created from above. This might also be the reason as to why some communities

'disappear' as soon as they reach their goals. The examples could be *Gerosios Vilties*, *Rasos* and *Lazdynai* community organizations.

"*The community is strong if it has strong and active people. Where there are no active people, there is the absence of good volunteers and the community's work is poor*" (the president of the *Union of Local Community Organizations of Lithuania*).

Many of the leaders interviewed have been in the leadership positions for their entire professional lives. Without any doubt, all of them possess good organizational skills and are able to effectively communicate with people and authorities.

6.3. Explaining non-participation: the outcome of communist legacies or the impact from economic liberalization and individualization?

Many of the interviewed community organization leaders mentioned a problem of low or non-participation of members of the community in organized activities (with an exception of group activists). Although it was emphasised by the interviewees, passivity and indifference were not blamed on the legacy of the Soviet past alone, but also explained by the liberalization and individualization of the Lithuanian economy and society, and by rapidly increasing social and class differences.

Almost all interviewees agreed that during Soviet time, people were taking more active part in various collective activities. The collective participants and informal gatherings were promoted at the workplace and in neighborhoods. The housing was dis-

tributed through the working place mainly. Therefore, people who lived in the same neighbourhood or in the same block were familiar with each other in one or another way. They had similar professional background or worked for the same institution. During the Soviet time people had more or less similar standards of living and therefore more common interests. They were also able to afford similar recreational and leisure activities. The Soviet nomenclature was allocated special type of housing and lived in a separate area of the city.

It has been documented by numerous studies that the collapse of the Soviet regime was followed by the rapid increase in the income differentiation amongst its population. People had to put more efforts in securing their standard of living. Therefore, there were much less time and recourses left for the participation in various groups and associations. People started joining associations and groups only if it could benefit them in one or another way. People have become consumption oriented and the major question that bothers them is – what's in it for me?[6]

The increasing income differentiation makes it difficult for people of different background to mobilize. The age difference was also emphasized by one community leader who stated that pensioners are reluctant to join movements. This could be true to some extent. With a low birth rate and increasing emigration from Lithuania, when mostly young people (up to 40) leave the country, the proportion of the population

of retirement age has been increasing. The majority of those who live in the apartment blocks are pensioners; some of them are active; however, the majority of them do not easily get involved in the activities of the community.

However, if serious problems arise (such as illegal construction, environmental issues), people become active and join campaigns organized by the activists. However, in general they are not keen on forming long-term movements and alliances.

"People unite for collective action only when some serious problems arise. Then they take action….. Otherwise, people are only looking for self-benefit. In Soviet times, people were more in contact; sense of community has been encouraged and promoted. People would often gather to celebrate and neighbours communicated with each other. Today community is only strong if it has a charismatic strong leader" (the leader of the *Šnipiškės* community organization).

A typical reaction of an ordinary citizen towards the activities of the community association is, as stated by the majority of the leaders, that they are happy to approve the actions, but are reluctant to get involved.

6.4. Communication with authorities and attempts to consolidate movements

The majority of the activists interviewed emphasized the problem of local self-government in Lithuania. The districts that should perform a function of the transmission of citizens' problems to the municipality and

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[6]　The similiar assumption was also expressed in the Žiliukaite et al, 2006 study.

then to the governmental decision making bodies are not functioning the way it is supposed to function. The districts are subordinated to the municipalities and perform the functions that are imposed from above; they represent the state's interests. The voice of ordinary citizens is hardly heard by state officials. In such circumstances, it is important for community organizations to consolidate their efforts by establishing an alliance with one another in order to be heard by the state officials. As it was mentioned in the previous sections, the Union of Local Community Organizations of Lithuania was established in 2010. Other cities of Lithuania formed their local community organizations uniting all community associations of the city.

The Vilnius communities' association was established in 2009 and currently unites 19 community organizations. The leader of the Vilnius communities' association reports constant problems related to communicating with the municipality of Vilnius and with the mayor of Vilnius: "*I would not call it confrontation, but I would call it the lack of communication or miscommunication*". Many of the interviewees also reported that community organizations perform the functions that should be taken care of by the districts or the municipality. For instance, the leader of the *Jeruzalė* community has managed to organize the cleaning up of the forest in the neighbourhood which was heavily polluted with litter since the Soviet times. Not only he organized community members, but also involved the soldiers located at the campus nearby. In order to get permission from the commander of the army to mobilize soldiers

for the clean up action it was required to obtain a letter from the head of the district of *Jeruzalė*. It took several hours for the community leader to persuade the head of the district to issue the letter. However, taking care of the forest and the surrounding territories of the neighbourhood of Jeruzalė is the responsibility of the district. But the only actions that helped to clean up the heavily polluted forest were the actions of the local activists. Since then, with the efforts of the leader of the community, the cleanup of the forest takes place regularly twice a year.

In a similar way, the community leader of Naujamiestis stated that their volunteers practically perform the job of the municipality. They unite to fight the unwanted constructions in their vicinity and to defend park areas in the city. The municipality often prioritizes private interests to the public ones.

7. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the activities of community organizations in the post-Soviet city of Vilnius. The particular attention was paid to the reasons for mobilization of local communities; the leadership and motivation; the reasons for non-participation; the communication with the local authorities. The findings of this paper show that community mobilizations are not taking place on the massive scale. However, they are being institutionalized and have achieved noteworthy results. Communities mobilize against illegal or unwanted constructions close to their vicinity or to defend green zones in the city. The leadership is also very important.

The successful movement is centered on a charismatic leader who devotes his/her time and non-material and material resources to attain results. The leaders of community organizations are mostly well educated and hold/held prominent positions.

The major explanations for non-participation can be found in difficult economical conditions of the majority of the population; low level of civil society; increasing individualization and income inequalities in Lithuanian society.

The findings of this paper demonstrate that the political and institutional structure is fairly unfavorable for local activists. The community organizations, especially those that were formed from below, are not supported by the local governmental structures. On the contrary, they are faced, in most of the cases, with authority's alienation and confrontation.

This study shows that urban mobilizations in the post-communist context are induced by the inability or unwillingness of governmental institutions to perform their functions to meet people's demands instead of prioritizing private interest demands. In many cases the community organizations perform the functions of local governmental institutions. The findings of this paper point out important gaps in the development of self-governance in Lithuania.

Acknowledgments

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SANTRAUKA

BENDRUOMENIŲ INICIATYVOS BŪSTO IR APLINKOSAUGOS PROBLEMŲ SRITYJE: VILNIAUS MIESTO ATVEJIS

Straipsnis analizuoja bendruomeninių organizacijų veiklą posovietiniame Vilniuje. Siekiama ištirti: priežastis, kodėl kuriasi Vilniaus bendruomeninės organizacijos; bendruomenės lyderių motyvaciją; priežastis, kodėl piliečiai vangiai dalyvauja bendruomeninių organizacijų veikloje; bendruomeninių organizacijų bendradarbiavimo su vietos valdžia problemas. Nors bendruomenių organizacijų veikla Vilniaus mieste yra fragmentiška, kai kurios jų pasiekė reikšmingų rezultatų. Bendruomeninės organi-

zacijos sėkmingai mobilizuojasi kovai su nelegaliomis statybomis jų kaimynystėje, taip pat siekdamos išsaugoti žaliąsias Vilniaus zonas. Sėkmingi bendruomeniniai judėjimai turi charizmatinių lyderių, kurie skiria ne tik savo laisvalaikį, bet ir piniginius resursus bendruomeninės organizacijos veiklai užtikrinti. Ekonominiai sunkumai, žemas pilietinės visuomenės lygis, didėjanti individualizacija ir pajamų nelygybė Lietuvoje trukdo bendruomenių veiklai plėtotis. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad politinė ir institucinė struktūra yra nepalanki pilietinėms iniciatyvoms. Vietos valdžia neremia pilietiškų bendruomeninių organizacijų (tų, kurios susikūrė piliečių iniciatyva, o ne buvo įkurtos savivaldybės pastangomis). Bendruomeninės organizacijos dažnai susiduria su vietos valdžios abejingumu arba patiria konfrontaciją su vietos valdžia.