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From a mirror of Kharkiv society to leading environmental movement: the case of "Green Front"

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This article draws on the example of the Green Front, an environmental movement in Kharkiv, to show how the actors' attention to the peculiarities of the local political and social context and available resources can help a social movement achieve considerable success. A movement without leadership, funded only by members, and broadly inclined to use direct action, the Green Front can be seen as a clear example of civic initiatives that present a growing alternative to professionalized and donor-funded NGOs in post-socialist countries. Though the initial campaign against road construction did not achieve its goal, some further campaigns were more successful. The Green Front has engaged in many environmental issues, established numerous contacts with other environmental groups in Ukraine and abroad, and begun lobbying at the national level. Its initial success was based on such factors as the entanglement of structural tensions present in the initial conflict in Kharkiv; its being a combination of a mass-movement and social-movement organization capable of expertise; its insistence on activating local inhabitants; and its successful positioning in the Ukrainian and regional political environments.

Key words: Green Front, environmental movements, social movements, NGOs, Ukraine, Kharkiv

Introduction

In the wide range of sociological literature on social movements, scholars have attempted to single out how and why mobilizations occur, how social movements typically organize, act, and interact with their political environment, and what circumstances or strategies cause them to achieve or fail to achieve their goals. Successive theories of social movements have concentrated on different aspects of their functioning. Theories of collective behavior analyze mobilizations in terms of certain types of reactions and interactions typical for big groups. Resource mobilization theories see social movements as rational actors that seek to accumulate and use available resources to achieve their goals. Another set of theories looks for explanations of how social movements function: whether they succeed in their political and social environment when faced with concrete (singular or typical) configurations of opportunities to act collectively, or of threats in case of contentious

politics. The interaction and positioning within this environment are important to those scholars who deal with cultural and political identities and framings of social movements. (To explore how social movements are typically analyzed, see della Porta and Diani 2006, Tarrow 2011, Tilly 2004). Particular efforts have been made in research to account for variables responsible for the mobilization and success or failure of social movements. In this paper, I propose to illustrate how choices of strategies and organizational forms in certain political and social contexts influence the successful functioning of a social movement. Though it is not possible for the paper to make reliable generalizations since the proposed analysis is based on only one case study – the environmental movement "Green Front" (*Zelenyi Front*, further abbreviated as GF) based in Kharkiv, Ukraine—it may contribute to the general picture of possible factors in the success of social movements. I argue that, in the studied case, the entanglement of structural conflicts in a single place at a single moment triggered a mass mobilization and the rapid founding of a social movement organization. These events were followed by a conscious positioning within the political and social context and by a choice of strategies and organizational form which took into account the specificity of this context, which allowed GF to realize a series of what can be deemed successes. In other words, it was the intersection of the structure of political opportunities, the specifics of the societal context, the reasonable use of resources, and adequate framing, which was crucial to this success – a finding which partially affirms all the accounts of social movements listed above but suggests that, if these elements were looked at from the point of view of separate theories, they would appear only partially true.

The question of what can be qualified as the "success" or "failure" of a social movement is not a triviality, but the object of theoretical considerations (see Giugni 1998: 383-385, Tarrow 2011: 217-220). Can it be reduced to the fulfillment of the program of a movement, or should other outcomes be considered as well? Must these outcomes necessarily be the object of the conscious efforts of social movement participants, or should the outcomes brought about unintentionally also be taken into account? In this paper I avoid making a sharp distinction between intended results and unintended outcomes of activities of social movements. The first reason for this is that the interviewed participants consider outcomes that may have been unintended to still be the results of their activities. If the local public became more conscious of environmental problems, it was, according to some interviewees, due to GF's

consciousness-raising activities; if the costs of corruption to political elites have grown, it may be due to growing public attention achieved through GF campaigns. The second reason is that, for social movements with an agenda not limited to a single issue (like GF), the achievement, or failure to achieve, a single goal (for example, preventing illegal logging in a single place) does not mean an interruption of activities and is not equal to a "general" success or failure of the movement. Indirect outcomes that are not easily detected or quantified sometimes still give a sense to the everyday activities of participants and motivate them to keep going. With this in mind, the following criteria are used to account for successes or failures of the studied movement: 1) the goals of a particular campaign are achieved; 2) its activities persevere on a relatively stable scale (thus, one can speak of the *sustainability* of the movement); 3) a network of reliable members and allies is established; 4) the movement is a known addressee for people facing problems which it can help resolve, thus for potential new members and allies; 5) a satisfactory mobilization can be achieved if needed; 6) the agenda of the movement has an impact on the agendas of political forces, state bodies, and/or media; and 7) a considerable segment of the population has perceived the agenda of the movement and changed its own behavior in a desirable direction. If these criteria are not achieved, it can be seen as partial failures of a movement.

For over two decades, civil society in Ukraine and other post-socialist countries has been associated with professionalized NGOs. However, as early as the late 1990s scholars began to realize that growing numbers of NGOs did not necessarily contribute to the democratization of political environments in east-European and former Soviet countries. The western policy of democracy promotion by means of funding NGOs has been criticized for many reasons (see Ishkanian 2007, 2013, 2014, Celichowski 2004, Mendelson and Glenn 2002, Mendelson 2002, Powell 2002, Hemment 2012). NGOs did not, so the critique goes, establish ties with local communities and governments, and, as a result, were not particularly effective in terms of having an actual influence on politics or the behavior of actors on the macro-level. NGOs felt more accountable to their Western donors than to local inhabitants, which led to low participation in their programs and a negative public image. NGOs often avoided open political conflicts over the most burning issues in countries. In many cases, the only *ratio essendi* of these organizations was the opportunity to compete for donors' financial support – a fact mirrored in the pejorative labelling of

NGOs as "grant eaters", widespread in former Soviet societies and frequently used by those parties in civil society who felt excluded by donors because of their ideology, such as nationalists. Civil society dominated by NGOs was said to be so disembedded from local contexts and oriented to the donors' vision that it was called "genetically engineered" (Ishkanian 2008: 72). Weinthal and Luong (2002) show that in Kazakhstan, Western funding of environmental NGOs even led to a decreased popular mobilization around environmental issues.

However, recently, both media and scholarship have begun to notice another kind of civil society actor in post-socialist countries. To follow Armine Ishkanian (Ishkanian 2014), they are called here "civic initiatives". They are characterized by an absence of strong hierarchies, concentration on local issues, independently formulated agendas, broad use of direct action, and the rejection of dependency on external funding. Since 2010 a growing number of civic initiatives have been observed in such countries as Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia. (However, some cases of this, such as the "Save old Kyiv" movement in Ukraine began as early as in the mid-2000s). It is striking that many of them were instigated by environmental or conservation issues, i.e. they were a sign of people's growing concern about their natural and urban environment.

Even before the events of "Euro-Maidan" in Ukraine, a country whose civic initiatives generally have been little noted in sociological literature, several movements committed to a single issue were able to mobilize hundreds to tens of thousands of protesters and achieve significant compromises with those in power or even force the withdrawal of their unpopular measures. The case presented in this paper, the Kharkiv-based environmental movement "Green Front", can be deemed one of the most successful initiatives of this sort and probably the most successful environmental one. It appeared as a result of environmental demands made by the local population independently of western resources or agendas and without a clear political or ideological stance either. Unlike other civic self-organization in Central Eastern Europe (see Císař 2013), GF's activities cannot be characterized as small-scale or episodic. Similarities to the "Save Teghut" environmental movement in Armenia (Ishkanian 2013) show that we are dealing with a post-Soviet phenomenon which bears evidence of a significant shift in civic activities in those countries. Other examples are protests against road construction in the Khimki Forest near Moscow

and a campaign against the launch of a factory on Lake Baikal in Russia (Martin 2011: 74–96).

The argument of this paper moves from description to explanation in order to make understandable how the interplay of strategies and context contributed to the relative success of the GF movement. In presenting the GF case, attention is paid to 1) the political and social environment within which it had and has to act; 2) the origins of the movement; 3) the organizational form of GF; 4) the stages in its development, 5) GF's ideology; and 6) the areas and forms of its activities. This description shows GF to be one of the very few Ukrainian movements which has managed to rise from a spontaneous one-issue protest to establish itself as a social movement and a social movement organization for a longer time. The very existence of a stable social movement and social movement organization for more than three years, with several campaigns which actually achieved their goals, enjoying broad acknowledgement in Kharkiv and other parts of Ukraine as well as among foreign environmental organizations, with lobbyist interventions on the national level, inspiring the formation of single-issue, local environmental initiatives which have often become allies of GF – all bear evidence of its relative success. This success requires explanation, so attention is given to those peculiarities of the political situation and the strategies of GF which made it possible.

This research is based on the following sources: GF's program documents and its reports on current issues (both available on its website); regional Kharkiv internet media reports (mostly the websites *Glavnoye*, *Mediaport*, and *ATN*) on the conflict in Gorki Park and, later and more broadly, on GF activities and attempts at engaging in political struggle; informal interviews with two personal contacts who previously participated in the movement in June and October 2010 (during the mass protests in Gorki Park and after regional elections); and four semi-structured in-depth interviews with eight movement participants (one woman and seven men) conducted in August 2013. One of the interviewees had a very important mediating position inside the movement, while others mostly concentrated on particular activities but were also engaged in the movement in general. It was via personal contacts that I got into touch with four of them, who then introduced me to the other four. All interviewees had been active in Green Front at least for two years. Their factual statements were mostly consistent with media reports, and some presented documents to provide evidence for the stories they told.

This article was written before and revised during the Euro-Maidan episode and its aftermath, and it seems too early to draw far-reaching conclusions about the influence of that on civic initiatives like GF. The political context, activities, events and claims of the movement are mostly restricted to the period of the "Party of Regions" concentration of power in 2010–2013. Little attention is paid to changes in the political environment connected with Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements or with the corresponding change of elites.

The Green Front: context, ideology and activities

Political and social environment

In Kharkiv, a large industrial, educational and scientific center in northeast Ukraine and the first capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, state institutions in 2010–2013 were centralized, the separation of powers blurred, and politics strongly entrenched within the business environment (even more strongly than in other regions of the country, in the view of some interviewees). One interviewee even called Kharkiv a "testing ground" for political developments in Ukraine, meaning that some brutal practices such as use of private militia forces to suppress public protests were tested in Kharkiv and then applied in other Ukrainian regions. In fact, cases of similar tactics used by authorities were later widely reported during Euro-Maidan, prominent opponents of which included the mayor of Kharkiv, Gennadiy Kernes, and the then head of the Kharkiv Oblast Administration, Mikhail Dobkin (replaced in 2014 as a result of Euro-Maidan). The two, known to be business partners and close friends, are widely known in the whole country for their extravagant and cynical speeches and actions, as well as a repressive approach to grassroots protests. Previously strong political opposition to their camp lost its significance after the Kernes-Dobkin team (who belonged to the ruling Party of Regions) achieved a contested victory in the regional elections of 2010. Since then, several Kharkiv oppositional politicians have changed sides to the ruling Party of Regions. Others lost credibility as they voted for unpopular measures or pursued private goals with the help of their mandates. The division between the ruling team and the opposition was seen by many Kharkiv inhabitants as nothing more than a deceptive media image; in fact, as one interviewee argued, they had good business relations and together enjoyed leisure activities such as golf, casino and drinking. This helplessness and hypocrisy of the opposition,

however, created space for grassroots initiatives to step in and independently confront the policies of the ruling class.

Several critical and oppositional regional media were closed down in the early 2010s, and official regional broadcasting became biased. One interviewee argued that this led inhabitants of Kharkiv to rely on rumors more than on TV: “If in Kharkiv there is a rumor that, say, something was poisoned, he [Mayor Kernes] can do what he may, nobody will believe it”. Those movement participants who tried to sue political and business elites, doubted judicial independence: they won cases very rarely, even when a law violation on the other side was evident. The same applied to prosecutions by the authorities. The police were at best ignorant and passive, but mostly aligned with the interests of the elites. During the protests in Gorki Park they didn’t take action to prevent loggers’ assaults on GF activists, while imprisoning for short terms some of the GF people (see further). The chief of the Kharkiv police in 2010 Aleksandr Barannik, according to reports by Kharkiv internet media, is a co-founder of businesses in paper container manufacturing and construction, hence he could be personally interested in logging (Yermakov 2011). At the same time some interviewees noted that policemen have from time to time sympathized with them, and are themselves victims of higher police echelons or austerity policies. Somewhat surprisingly, the environmental inspection authority is criticized by GF members even more sharply for their passivity and bias than are the police.

Private structures are also heavily involved in activities which locals may feel to be contrary to their interests. There are for example some imperfections in the Soviet-era laws on benefits for housing cooperatives. This accounts for the flourishing of fictive cooperatives which buy public lands at extremely low prices in order to build on them the private villas of politicians/businessmen, or to sell them further at market prices. Even when regulations are fairly well suited to protecting the environment and public spaces, they are ignored by the vast majority of actors involved (except for GF which claims to be defending the law in the absence of other actors capable of such defense). Different small firms are involved in logging, some of which are associated with Kharkiv elites; others, however, simply try to steal timber from city parks or streets as raw material. One key GF member mentioned that they caught loggers from a company in Lviv, a distant city in western Ukraine, at this questionable activity on Kharkiv streets.

Several interviewed activists complained about the passive, uninterested, and ignorant Kharkiv public who are difficult to involve in environmental struggles. Researchers of social movements in other post-Soviet countries in fact also cite apathy and a sense of disempowerment as an important challenge to civic initiatives (Ishkanian 2013). Even though some members of GF don't think it necessary to mobilize a broad public for every particular rally, sensitizing the population to the aims of GF is seen by them as an important task. A part of this passive public probably supported Kernes-Dobkin politics because these installed new entertainment sites in central Gorki Park and generally their team was seen as "developing the city"; media propaganda certainly contributed to this opinion. Others were cynical (those who would buy a piece of land themselves in a park if they were rich enough), skeptical (nothing can be done anyway), or just too busy to join in a protest. However, GF members were proud that, due to their example, new spots of local resistance aiming to protect public spaces and the environment regularly began to emerge in city and region. Resistance would have been simpler if loggers could have been persuaded to sabotage their own work, but they didn't want to do this because they were paid only for the felled trees, not their working time. Interviewees who often got into conversations with loggers said that sometimes they come from other regions or even are brought from prisons to do logging. Activists generally understand that they are not the main wrongdoers but only paid workers who don't consider the consequences and moral aspects of their work. After many raids by GF activists in the city's parks to monitor them for logging, loggers got to know GF activists by sight and waged a kind of guerilla war, hiding when the environmentalists came and returning to work as they left.

Origins of the movement

Different local hotspots of environmentalist struggle existed in the city long before the Gorki Park conflict in 2010. Most often these small groups tried to defend a park or a street as trees were being felled and construction planned. Another group demanded the reopening of a closed tram line on Pushkinskaya Street. The environmental group "Pechenegi" had been well established for more than 20 years. But it was the struggle over the Kharkiv Forest Park (*Lesopark*) that preceded most immediately the conflict in Gorki Park and the emergence of GF. As the Kharkiv Golf Club, managed by Yuriy Sapronov, deputy chief of the Kharkiv Oblast Administration and close

associate of Mikhail Dobkin, purchased another part of Forest Park to extend its territory, locals from the nearby Piatikhatki district got organized to prevent the golf club from illegally logging and force the return of the ground to its status of communal property. Other small grassroots organizations also took part. According to one participant in the protests in Piatikhatki, who later became a GF activist, the Pechenegi and Forest Park protest groups were those who first came to Gorki Park to resist the building of a road through this most popular city park. This constitutes the central part of GF's history.

On 19th of May 2010, Kharkiv City Council decided to build a road through Gorki Park and cut down 503 trees there, arguing that the road would relieve traffic from the city center. The public was generally skeptical about this argument as there were other and better ideas for diverting the traffic; furthermore, it was suspected that the argument was just a cover for plans to build private housing or entertainment facilities in the park. The next day, May 20, workers began to fell the trees and the first protesters' tents emerged on the site (see Istoriya protivostoyaniya 2010). That day is now considered GF's founding date.

While these protests in the park seem to have never gathered more than several hundred participants at a time, net numbers of protesters should be estimated much higher because many protesters didn't stay in the park all the time: as some left, others came. Protesters not only organized pickets at the site and before government buildings, but employed more militant forms of direct action such as blocking construction machinery, tree spiking, sitting in the trees or chaining themselves to them in order to prevent felling. The latter strategy did not always work, as loggers felled some trees even as people were in them. Coupled with threats to protesters from chainsaws this led to a greater outcry and made the conflict widely known both in Ukraine and abroad. Since the workers didn't have documents necessary for logging and construction, protesters called the police, but the police did nothing and even charged some activists with "disobedience". Amnesty International declared two of them, Andrei Yevarnitsky and Denis Chernega, to be prisoners of conscience (Amnesty International 2010). A private structure called "Municipal Guard" also interfered to suppress the protests. There were allegations that environmental activists with injuries caused by loggers and the "Municipal Guard" were refused medical care in city hospitals during the conflict. From May 31 to June 2 the Municipal Guards and loggers assaulted protesters, beating activists and journalists and sawing down trees

with people in them. On June 2, the last trees destined for logging were sawn down. At this point most active protests ceased and the less visible, but arduous work necessary to establish and develop an environmental movement began. Still, further sporadic protests, monitoring and attempts to prevent further logging in the park endured. Finally, Kharkiv City Council managed to realize its plans to build a road and entertainment facilities in the park.

On August 3, 2010, the GF founding conference took place. This event can be interpreted as the establishment of an "environmental movement organization", the notion used "to describe organizations that form within the overall environmental movement and essentially constitute that movement" (Fagan and Jehlicka 2003: 50). The activities of this organization subsequently allowed the survival of grassroots environmental activism in Kharkiv and region between the waves of mobilization, and contributed to the possibility and effectiveness of further waves of mobilization. The environmental movement now had an organization with more-or-less defined responsibilities, procedures, and a transparent structure.

Organizational form

GF can be described as both a mass movement and a social movement organization. Even though the definitions of a social movement are far from unambiguous, GF fits the most popular ones. It has used typical repertoires and "WUNC" (worthiness, unity, number, and commitment) displays during its campaigns, thus fitting the criteria of social movements proposed by Tilly (2004: 5-6). In accordance with the definition of della Porta and Diani (2006: 20-21), GF had clearly defined opponents in each particular campaign and participated in dense informal networks linking activists who shared a collective identity. GF cannot be reduced to the social movement organization because its membership criteria are unclear (a fact recognized by the participants) and there is a core of committed activists surrounded by a fluid network of individuals and smaller groups on particular issues.

This core constitutes the social movement organization, legally registered as a "community organization" (*hromads'ka orhanizaciya*). Many of the committed activists possess expertise and experience partly due to previous activities of GF and partly to education or pre-GF activism. One interviewee even used the notion "expert organization", meaning that in many regards, GF as a social movement organization acts similarly to an NGO. Most important decisions are made at the General

Assembly which takes place twice a year. The Assembly elects an executive body of the organization, the Coordination Council (see Statut 2010). The head of the Coordination Council is a rather technical position elected by the Council and this person is responsible for signing organizational papers. Working groups are supposed to develop and maintain activities in particular areas of GF interest. There are both regular and temporary working groups, the latter responsible for the preparation of particular events. Regular working groups, by contrast, maintain long-term campaigns which, as a GF member put it, are more important than particular one-time events. Though it seems to have a very clear and well-defined structure, some interviewees suggested that in everyday activities GF is far less clearly structured than that, and the division of responsibilities is rather informal. One interviewee said that even if a working group was created, it doesn't mean that it actually functions. The task of counting the number of GF participants is less trivial than it may seem because it is far from clear who precisely should count as a regular member of the movement. There are, for instance, protesters on local issues in their district who may join other GF activities or campaigns but do not take any responsibilities. One activist who knew the organizational structure estimated the organization had more than 100 members, but was contradicted by several other GF members.

GF does not receive any money from external sources, nor does it have a membership fee or a regular source of common funds, thus differing from many environmental NGOs in Central Eastern Europe, despite the similarity of many of its tasks and activities (see Fagan and Jehlicka 2003; Carmin and Fagan 2010: 699), making it rather resemble civic initiatives which consist only of volunteers. Its activities are financed entirely through the voluntary contributions of members. If a member doesn't have enough funds for the implementation of her own idea, others can join in a fundraising effort, though this is not obligatory. Evaluations of this financing model differ among GF members. One interviewee considers it to be perfect, stating that professional fundraising would give GF the reputation of a professional organization acting in the place of locals, thus discouraging these from active participation. Others consider constant individual financing to be too demanding, and they would like to look for another model.

Development of the movement

The same year the initial protests in Gorki Park occurred and the case was still being broadly discussed in regional media, the movement tried to define itself as a political force. This issue was very controversial among the participants: some wanted to continue as a grassroots movement, others considered it necessary to enter politics and participate in the regional elections. As a compromise, GF decided not to take part in the elections under this name but to grant its participants who wanted to run in the elections the full right to do so on an individual basis. Though GF members joined lists of different parties, most (11) joined the list of "Green Planet" (*Zelena Planeta*), a small regional party whose leader agreed to include GF members on the list. Should GF members enter local governance bodies, they were supposed to work for the GF cause and were warned at an organizational conference that they would be excluded and publicly shamed should they not. "Green Planet", however, was broadly associated with GF movement in the media and in fact was considered by them its political arm. Ultimately no one from GF won a seat on the City Council, as the two percent of votes received by "Green Planet" on October 31 were not enough (on the participation of GF members in the local elections, see Viedrov 2010b).

After this failure, the question of constituting GF as an electoral political force was resolved automatically. It became clear that GF should continue its activity as a mass movement and an environmental movement organization while distancing itself from any of the bourgeois political forces. The following years brought continuous learning with the incorporation of new local initiatives, issues and activities into the GF agenda by engaging and consulting citizens and cooperating many times with other actors. There is no claim that the numbers of participants grew steadily: some people joined the movement, others left. But still, enough remained to permit GF to continue its activities on a regular basis (for remarks on the development of the movement during and after the Euro-Maidan protests, see Conclusion).

Ideology

GF ideology is symbolized by its logo: a tree growing from a fist. The movement tries to take a stand on all significant environmental issues in the region and is interested in other issues only to the extent they are related to environmental protection. Militancy – suggested by the fist – however, is to be understood as relative to the Ukrainian political context: GF does apply direct action broadly, but never breaks the law.

For most members the environmental agenda is more than enough for active civil society engagement because it concerns the very foundations of human existence: air, water, climate, natural resources and healthy environment in general. One veteran GF member says:

> Ecology concerns everybody, every human must be an environmentalist in one way or another (…) Because it is necessary for everybody and concerns everybody, whether you are an entrepreneur, soldier, cop, or local official. (...) This is such a universal platform that it can unite everybody, why do we [the GF] need to join somebody else?

However, the interdependence of environmental and other social problems is also acknowledged by activists. A concept document on GF activities clearly states that environmental and social problems cause each other (Peregon 2011). Still, GF doesn't join non-environmental campaigns organizationally, though members are encouraged to do so individually.

The same applies to individual political activities motivated by ideologies of particular members. The organization itself does not have any clear political ideology besides environmental protection and commitment to transparency, democratic participation, and the rule of law. In the organization there are nationalists, liberals, social democrats, socialists and anarchists. However, there is reason enough to call the underlying presuppositions of GF program documents and activities "social democratic" in tendency, even if this fact is neither stated clearly nor manifested by many members. The emphasis of the GF program is put heavily on resisting the seizure of common land and the ensuing logging and construction (Zelenyi Front 2010). Another important issue is the development of public transport. The electoral program of "Green Planet" included such issues as repair of roads and housing, abolition of agential firms in municipal services and public control of their prices, the priority of education and healthcare during budget planning, protection of heritage assets, and democratic participation in local communities (Kandidaty 2010). Most interviewees see local government representatives as morally corrupt because they pursue their individual aims and do not care about the public interest. However, protection of small and medium-size businesses is also mentioned in the "GF Action Agenda" (Zelenyi Front 2010); some interviewees praised private land ownership such as in the US as a guarantee that ordinary persons will not be dispossessed of it by

corporations or the state or had nothing against the privatization of parks or forests as long as their owners ensure their preservation. While one interviewee complained about the anarchic condition of Ukrainian society, where no regulations can be implemented, another represented the state as an alien body disturbing and dispossessing the people, who should collectively organize to resist it. Thus, as already suggested, one should not look for a consistent political ideology in the movement. Different individuals have different ideologies and some don't have any. They consider environmental protection compatible with different political programs. In this respect, GF's orientation does not fully correspond to the features ascribed to environmental movements by Yearley (2005: 19-25): though GF seeks to scientifically ground its claims, and admits that many problems it is dealing with are of global scope, it cannot be called anti-capitalist and in general does not have any clear views on the economy.

One ideological feature of GF which is, on the contrary, perfectly clear, is its legalism. Not only do GF members not mention law violation as an option, they come close to being itself a kind of law-enforcement agency for environmental protection in situations where authorities responsible for it do not fulfill their obligations. This peculiarity was stressed by one interviewee as specifically Ukrainian, since "western environmentalists try not so much to enforce the law (because that is not necessary) as to change it" (though this may be doubted because scholars point to significant problems in implementing adopted environmental laws in the West and to activists' efforts needed to force compliance with them (della Porta and Diani 2006: 233; Cable and Benson 1993). The broadly legalist stance of GF is apparent in that members, when criticizing illegal logging, rarely forget to stress that the loggers lack the necessary permits. The following passage may illustrate:

> …destroy a fence? Well, sometimes, but it doesn't help, because they just put up a new one. …within some broader campaign, it can make sense. But we don't go around just breaking down fences – that's senseless. Destroying fences is a good tactic firstly, if you have all the documents stating that this particular fence is illegal; secondly, if you can win the attention of the public and journalists. Journalists need a picture, they need action – in that case, it goes. Within the law, we invent tactics such as beating on the fence. …not always, but if necessary. Just imagine, they put up these metal fences, and if you just beat it with a stick, anyone behind it will go crazy [from the noise]. And what's illegal about that?

To say that GF ideology is legalist is not to say its activists do not see imperfections in current laws. In protesting against fracking, they first demand the adoption of regulations necessary to minimize environmental damage. But, once again, if this is to be achieved legally, the main emphasis is put on good legislation and its successful enforcement. This peculiarity supports the trend identified by Dalton and Reccia (2003: 12) who state that environmental movements in developing countries are less inclined to engage in challenging actions.

Areas and forms of activities

The *forms* of GF activity correspond to the particular aims, i.e. areas in which GF works. These include journalistic and educational work, demonstrations, research needed for environmental activism, cleanups and tree surgery, law-suits, requests to public prosecutors, police and environmental inspection units to intervene and stop violations of law, court appeals, and more. This is not an exclusive case, for the "Save Teghut Civic Initiative" in Armenia, formed in 2007 for the sake of preservation of the Teghut forest which was in danger of devastation through extensive mining, also engaged in multiple and very different activities to achieve their goals (Ishkanian 2013: 47). Below some central areas of GF activity are specified.

1. *Resistance to further logging in Gorki Park*. Since the completion of the new road considered by the GF to be illegal, the background regime of activity in the park shifted to monitoring illegal logging. Petitions made to prosecutors and complaints filed to state agencies were sent, but without particular success. From time to time, new logging occurs and causes overt conflict: In the summer of 2013 an activist was beaten and two further activists who called the police were arrested by the latter.

2. *Forest Park protection*. The main issue regarding the Forest Park (*Lesopark*) is the contestation of the land sales and lease to the golf club and other private bodies. The organization cited the Land Code of Ukraine which prohibits the privatization of forests, parks and other public areas. An interviewee, who has challenged such seizures, reports that about 600 ha of Forest Park has been sold or leased. Activists consider a partial success the fact that a big part (1105 ha) of the Forest Park was turned into the regional landscape park "Sokolniki-Pomerki". This makes further sale of the territory more difficult. Therefore, GF aims to have the

whole of the Forest Park made into a regional landscape park. The fact that some areas of the park were not given the status of recreational zone gives potential purchasers a legal loophole to get the land. Different clever schemes, such as the housing cooperatives mentioned above, are broadly used to this end. As a provocation and to irritate the opponents of the land-grabbing, a fictive NGO "Social movement Green Front" (which had nothing to do with the "real" GF) was created, to which land in Forest Park was then leased.

3. Resistance to other cases of logging and land sales. This is an everyday struggle in different parts of the city and region. New local initiatives often emerge when people see trees sawn down under their windows. They usually call GF members who then advise them, explain what to do, provide them with petition samples and so on. Sometimes, participants in these new struggles join GF. Several cases will be discussed below as examples of successful campaigns.

4. The struggle against fracking in Ukraine. The government of Mykola Azarov signed a contract with Shell and Chevron granting rights to extract shale gas through hydraulic fracturing (fracking). GF joined a broad anti-fracking coalition of several Ukrainian environmental organizations and local populations in the endangered territories. The main reasons behind the protests include possible environmental consequences of this extraction method (Ukrainian environmentalists like others fear possible pollution of ground and water), the absence of necessary regulations in Ukrainian law and the lack of transparent negotiations. GF members initiated the development of, among other things, national fracking criteria for environmental and technical safety to be proposed by a group of experts (Kharkivs'ki naukovci 2012). They asked sympathizers to make copies of the documentary "Gasland" by Josh Fox and send the DVDs to GF to be redistributed among villagers who rarely have Internet access and must restrict themselves to TV and radio which don't inform them about the dangers of fracking. Another broadly mentioned protest action by GF was the picketing of Shell petrol stations in Kharkiv to convince drivers to boycott this corporation. Both the opponents and methods of these activities aligned GF not only with other Ukrainian grassroots initiatives but also with movements critical of Shell in different parts of the world (see Yearley 2005: 26–40).

5. Prevention of chernozem thefts. GF expressed their great concern as the stripping and sales of *chernozem* ("black earth", i.e. humus), though forbidden, became widespread in Ukraine. This practice causes great environmental and

economic damage, as it takes thousands of years to rebuild humus layers. GF activists with the help of local populations documented cases of such violation, gained media attention for the problem and thereby made responsible state agencies acknowledge its existence. In several cases thefts of chernozem were stopped.

6. *Cleanups.* Interviewees paid much attention to the so-called *subbotniki* (environmental cleanups): Upon a GF call to action, people gather in a park or a forest and clean them of refuse. Though not many people gather on these occasions (in Forest Park, for example, it used to be 20 to 30 persons), and many of them are established activists or their friends, GF members nevertheless seem to consider the *subbotniki* an important environmental consciousness-raising activity.

7. *Other activities.* GF is also involved in the struggle against illegal sales of rare spring flowers, the collection of discharged batteries, tree watering and planting, the struggle for environmentally friendly public transport, and animal protection.

Why has Green Front been successful?

This question can be approached in two different ways. First, by identifying achievements and characteristics of GF that qualify it as a successful organization. Second, by determining what the strategies and activities of GF, and what the characteristics of the political and social contexts were which contributed to this particular success. Below, the success of a social movement is understood in terms of the criteria listed in the introduction.

Answering the first question is necessary to answering the second, even more so in the face of skepticism about the actual condition of the movement as expressed by several participants. Two of them were discouraged about their efforts to mobilize a broader public, another complained about the lack of mass mobilizations as well, and suggested that the organization had become a social club. To test whether the factors listed below were causally effective in the case of other social movements and in other political surroundings, one would have to analyze a series of other cases. In general, determining which strategies are more effective than others faces some serious obstacles (see della Porta and Diani 2006: 227–229). Therefore the following statements are not to be taken as capable of generalization; they refer rather to a single political situation and opportunity structure.

Signs of success

To systematize the assessment of activities of GF on a "success–failure" scale, I return to the criteria proposed in the introduction: 1) the goals of a particular campaign are achieved; 2) activities persevere at a relatively stable level (the sustainability of the movement); 3) a network of reliable members and allies is established; 4) the movement is a known addressee for people facing problems which it can help resolve, thus for potential new members and allies; 5) a sufficient mobilization can be achieved if needed; 6) the agenda of the movement has an impact on the agenda of political forces, state bodies, and media; and 7) a considerable segment of the population has perceived the agenda of the movement, and its behavior has changed in a direction desirable to the latter.

It should be clear from the description above that GF scored well, at least in terms of the second and third criteria. As for the first, most transparent criterion, several examples were named by the participants themselves. The case of the Birchwood (*Berezovaya Roscha*) was among the main achievements of GF. There the tree-felling and construction was preceded by the grant of the land to a private owner, a legally doubtful move. In January 2012, GF activists won the court case against it, but at first the verdict was not enforced, so that the logging and construction continued. So GF had to continue the struggle. By the end of the year, however, law-enforcement agents did order the destruction of construction sites and the termination of logging. Though the self-declared owner appealed in another court to reverse this decision, GF activists still celebrate the case as one of the most important victories for the movement. Other successful campaigns launched by GF were against *chernozem* sales in the town of Pesochin most prominently, and attempts to stop the sale of rare spring flowers.

Further achievements mentioned by GF members involved rather the self-organization of local inhabitants in different Kharkiv districts and towns of the region, reportedly inspired by GF and/or supported by it, at least in an advisory capacity. Logging on Moskovskiy Prospekt and Kultury Street in Kharkiv, and in Ryzhovskiy Park in Pesochin were stopped or prevented this way. GF members even consider to be their success some cases where a community still has not won the case, such as the confrontation in the park Green Forest (*Zelenyi Gay*), because the locals self-organized. *Subbotniks* (weekend cleanups) are considered a success exactly because

many of them are launched by self-organized locals instead of by GF which organized many *subbotniks* in Kharkiv before. The underlying assumption here is that GF's work of consciousness-raising has reached its goal, though it is difficult to establish whether such mobilizations of local populations resulted from GF efforts. Several interviewees, however, were sure that they actually did. Similarly, despite failing to achieve its immediate goal, the "Save Teghut Civic Initiative" managed to raise public awareness of environmental problems and encourage people speak out on their concerns (Ishkanian 2013: 55).

Generally, GF stands out among other Ukrainian grassroots movements as an established long-term environmental movement *and* environmental movement organization that emerged during a particular protest event. Neither the "Orange Revolution" of 2004, nor mass protests by small entrepreneurs in 2011 gave birth to anything similar. In other cases, such as student protests, marches by Chernobyl and Afghanistan war veterans, demonstrations against threats to the architectural heritage of Kyiv, the existence of established organizations *preceded* the big events broadly covered by the media. In Ukraine, maintaining regular activities over several years and constant media attention are quite an achievement for a grassroots movement.

The organization is widely acknowledged as a leading environmentalist force in the city of Kharkiv, the Kharkiv region and other Ukrainian regions. GF activists constantly receive calls from people who face environmental threats in Kharkiv or the region. "...We have a great force. What is it? …that people believe us and like us", said one. People from other Ukrainian regions sometimes call GF members as well. GF has established contacts with Russian, German, and American environmentalists as well as with some western parliamentarians, and has not gone unmentioned in national and foreign media such as the Washington Post or Deutsche Welle. One interviewee told (not necessarily accurately) of a young man who applied to an exchange program in Switzerland and got extra points for his participation in GF. However, these international connections don't mean that the agenda of GF is set, directly or indirectly, by foreign partners. GF represents a pattern of functioning typical for environmental movements in those Eastern European countries who have not entered negotiations with the EU or have made slow progress in negotiations (for the distinction between environmental movements in these countries and those of EU members in CEE, see Carmin and Fagan 2010: 698-699).

GF has also succeeded several times in its lobbying work on the national level. Its suggestions were included in such documents as the "National Plan of Environmental Protection Measures to 2015" and the "Public Evaluation of National Environmental Policies" of 2011. According to an interviewee, the IP of most visits to the GF website belongs to the main environmental inspector (i.e., the head of State Environmental Inspection Authority of Ukraine). Thus to a considerable degree it has become a major actor in the environmental domain, recognized by local populations, third sector, the media and even state bodies.

Factors which may have contributed to the success of GF

Further suggestions as to what factors contributed first to the successful mobilization and grounding of the movement, and then to its successful activities, stem mostly from the analysis of media coverage of events concerning GF, GF program documents, and informal interviews with movement participants. The initial hypotheses derived from this analysis were mostly confirmed and complemented by the in-depth interviews of August 2013.

1. *The conflict in Gorki Park emerged from an entanglement of at least six structural tensions present in Kharkiv society in 2010*. It was this interdependence of different conflicts which brought to the park many people who previously had not been engaged in any environmental-movement activities (see Viedrov 2010a). Each conflict contributed to the mobilization, but it was their coincidence at a single time and place that triggered mobilization. At the stage of the Gorki Park protest, this coincidence of structural factors was more critical to the mobilization than any particular framing of the conflict by activists. This is another striking resemblance to the Teghut protests in Armenia which are interpreted as a nexus of different environmental, social, and political issues (Ishkanian 2013: 41-42).

Most evidently, the conflict surrounding the logging of trees in the park was an environment issue. Another aspect was related to the repressive approach of police, loggers and private security firms towards the protesters. This led to further escalation until the final crackdown occurred. As della Porta and Diani suggest, encounters with illegitimate authority promotes the formation of identity (2006: 112); this was the case in Gorki park, where confronting the force sent by the authorities led to a stronger feeling of common cause among protesters. Resistance to the real-estate development of the park was not an environmental conflict since the beneficiaries of the

development were themselves not interested in destroying the forest; they just wanted the land for themselves as a nice place to relax. It was really about the division of the city into two zones, the first for the rich and successful, and the second, for all the rest who could never afford to move into the first. This closely resembles class conflict. Protesters were aware of the close connections between big business, city officials, high-ranking police authorities and organized criminals. They felt excluded from the opportunities gained by the elites when authorities permitted public land appropriations and private development.

At that time, the pro-Tymoshenko opposition in Kharkiv was led by the charismatic Arsen Avakov (as of this writing, Minister of Interior of Ukraine) and was still popular among the protesters. Even in 2013, many GF activists thought that Avakov, who supported the protests (for whatever motivation), had helped them in 2010 by facilitating media coverage of the events and by providing them legal services. It can hardly be doubted that some opposition supporters joined the protests precisely because Avakov supported them and his opponents, Kernes and Dobkin, opposed them. So the fifth conflict was between two political camps, the "White and Blue" (i.e., the Party of Regions and its supporters) and the "Orange" (i.e., opposition around the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc and its supporters) – a pretty clear cleavage at that moment, though some supporters of the Party of Regions were also among the protesters. Finally, two models of society competed in Gorki Park: While the ruling elite tried to build centralized, verticalized power, protesters exercised the building of horizontal democratic structures embodying solidarity and decision-making among equals.

If the conflict had been only about the environment, it hardly could have developed into such a major protest – there would not have been enough interested people to establish a strong grassroots movement around this or any single issue. For example, an interviewee explains as follows why he took part in the protest:

> ...For me it was a spontaneous protest… at that moment, in the park, the many things we all suffer from and don't protest about, were boiling over, and people like me began to take part in protest organizations.... But the park issue really just exploded and... when we arrived I found to my great astonishment how many people in Kharkiv think precisely like me... I was surprised because those events were the essence of the injustice of the ruling.

This coincidence of structural conflicts which triggered the mobilization was thus hardly exploited consciously to amplify the base of protest or to create a movement. But the factors contributing to the successes of GF, once it was founded, became elements of a conscious strategy built on knowledge about conditions in the surrounding society and available resources.

2. *The combination of mass movement and an organization strong in expertise.* This feature was heavily stressed as very central to GF by one interviewee. The majority of other environmental organizations in Ukraine are NGOs, and it was not widespread in Ukraine before 2010 that mass movements were either initiated by or emerged from environmental protest. In this respect GF has long been unique. Functioning NGOs can be good at lobbying work and at achieving small improvements. Several interviewees, however, criticized professionalized environmental organizations in Kharkiv for their strong loyalty to established power. By contrast, though mass movements can bring down big projects or otherwise change matters significantly, they often lack the competencies necessary to reach their goals and implement improvements. So it is hardly surprising that it can be a good strategy to combine the militant force provided by a broad public with the special competencies of experts. Moreover, experts can share their competencies with other activists by teaching and advising them.

3. *Refusal to act in the place of local inhabitants.* Most interviewees suggested that they were neither able nor willing to get into struggles if locals who called on them did nothing themselves. The "Conception of Environmental Activities" of GF contains the principle "GF doesn't want and doesn't have to become an emergency service" (Peregon 2011). But another consideration behind this strategy was certainly the wish to mobilize as many people as possible instead of acting on their behalf. The experience of another significant Ukrainian mass movement and movement organization, "Save Old Kyiv", can illustrate this reasonable strategy. This grassroots initiative claiming the democratic "right to the city" and fighting the privatization of public spaces was criticized for embracing "action group" or "Chip and Dale rescue team" behavior. For a while, every time local inhabitants called them, they came, destroyed the fences and fought with security men. But the mobilization of local inhabitants often did not ensue because of lack of resources and difficulties with the elaboration of common framing (Ishchenko and Dutchak 2010: 111). It seems that

the opposite strategy advocated by GF, that of activating local inhabitants first, was more successful in this respect.

4. Successful positioning in the Ukrainian and regional political environment. It is important that in Ukraine, politics has long been associated by many with the struggle of political parties for power, not with the democratic development of rules of coexistence in a political community. Therefore politics was considered something extremely dirty, something one would do better not getting into. To a great extent, GF was aware of this widespread view and built its strategy accordingly. In an official statement GF claims it does not represent any political force and that the movement is fundamentally "apolitical". Among its members are people from different political parties as well as those far from politics (Kakuyu politicheskuyu silu 2010). At the dawn of the movement in 2010, the Kernes-Dobkin team tried to convince Kharkiv inhabitants through their media that the whole GF movement was instigated by the political opposition – an accusation many supporters of Kernes and Dobkin believed. Even some independent observers wrote that GF consisted of two parts: one that strongly supported oppositional political camp and an independent one. If one takes into account Avakov's presence in Gorki Park, enthusiastically covered by media, and the strong involvement of the Kharkiv pro-opposition "Prorvemsia!" group in the Gorki Park conflict, this vision was not far from the truth. And it complicated things for GF when its members tried to convert some Kernes-Dobkin supporters. However, this changed after an open conflict between GF and representatives of the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc in Kharkiv in 2011, when GF activists realized that a newly privatized site in Forest Park belonged to Liubomir Grigorets, the oblast official from the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc. Grigorets blamed GF for instigating a baseless scandal. However neither Grigorets nor BYUT made a public apology. Then when Yuliya Yudina, a former GF member and at the same time member of the "Prorvemsia!" group, wrote an article famous for its strong criticism of GF for being too apolitical and ungrateful to BYUT (Yudina 2011), it became clear that GF was keeping a distance from all the political parties. One activist said, "We ceased to be accused of being paid [for our activities] after we broke off with Avakov".

Several (though not all) interviewees strongly opposed any political involvement of the movement, arguing that it should monitor and oppose – if necessary – any ruling political force, and that a social movement should be "nobler"

than all the parties and only use them to promote its own agenda. The idea that parties should compete for the implementation of the environmental agenda proposed by GF was expressed several times. One interviewee seemed happy to proclaim that all the members of GF who wanted to go into politics had already done so. Only one interviewee, who was once a local council member, explicitly said it was necessary to compete for power (meaning though, the political engagement of individual environmentalists rather than development of GF into political party).

At the same time, not only does GF involve people of different political sympathies, but it is open for cooperation with any political forces ready to implement its agenda, or at least, to do something for GF: share important information, respond to a request or question, and so on. Interviewees did not strongly object against the presence of political parties at GF rallies or routine demonstrations. There were events at which members of the radical far-right "Svoboda" and far-left "Trudova Kharkivschyna" (a group of communists who broke with the Communist Party) took part along with GF. This story was told even somewhat proudly: "We united the extremes". Similarly, openness to individual members of different political convictions and parties while simultaneously keeping political forces and ideologies at a distance distinguished the strategy of the "Save Teghut Civic Initiative" (Ishkanian 2013: 50). However, it is doubtful whether this openness to different kinds of political alliances while keeping them all at a distance will be possible after the events of Euro-Maidan.

As for other social movements and NGOs, GF cooperates with many environmental organizations and some regional non-environmental organizations which have issues in common with GF, such as the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group and the Foundation for Regional Initiatives. Close contacts with the cultural and educational national-democratic group "Prosvita" can be explained as a typical way of connecting two organizations (see della Porta and Diani 2006: 128): they share one or more activists who are strongly committed to both. GF has had unsuccessful experiences with other social movements, as in the case of the "People's Council of the Kharkiv Region", an alliance of different NGOs from Kharkiv. GF left it not only because other organizations in the alliance supported the new director of the Gomolshan Forests national park (*Gomolshanski Lisy*), strongly opposed by GF, but also because of the absence of any meaningful activities on their part, and ideological stances which were inadequate for some in GF.

GF's clear avoidance of alignments with political forces has prevented its absorption by any of them and contributed to its popularity and reputation among the broad public, and in some cases even among political forces. A clever system of alliances has helped the movement become known and achieve many of its goals.

Conclusion

The Green Front, both an environmental movement and environmental movement organization from Kharkiv, is unique in the Ukrainian political context and at the same time serves as a prominent example of a growing trend in post-socialist countries. It was formed as a result of the mass mobilization over a particular local issue in which several structural conflicts of Kharkiv society were interwoven, and managed to survive, broaden its agenda, and achieve the recognition of the public, other environmental activists, and even the authorities. This is far from a typical story for Ukraine, where recent mass mobilizations, at least those preceding Euro-Maidan, did not end with the formation of sustainable grassroots movements. The relative success of the movement in several campaigns which achieved their goals, the stable activities, creation of a network of members and allies, and the recognition of and impact on the local population and political agendas, was due to strategy-building and everyday work which attended to the peculiarities of local political and social contexts and available resources. This thesis gives partial support to several classical theories of social movements (which concentrate on resource mobilization, the structures of political opportunity, the building of collective identities, and framings) which underscore different important aspects of the activities of social movements.

This perhaps unusual transformation of a spontaneous one-issue protest into an environmental movement with a broad agenda as described in this paper should not hide the many similarities it has to other civic initiatives which have emerged in recent years in other post-socialist countries such as Russia, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia. Unlike professionalized NGOs, GF doesn't depend on Western funding or the agendas of donors, it takes the grievances of local populations as the main starting point for its activities, lacks clear hierarchical structures, and doesn't shy away from the broad use of direct action.

Similarities to other civic initiatives suggest that their growing popularity in the region is not accidental and may bear a connection to the type of social and political environment common to the countries where it can be observed. The most

striking analog to GF seems to have been the "Save Teghut Civic Initiative" in Armenia (see Ishkanian 2013: 46-53). Both movements emerged in reaction to a whole series of environmental, social and political problems; both are inclusive but non-partisan, open to people from different political forces and of different ideologies, cooperate with all the forces interested in their issues, but avoid forming any political preferences at the organizational level; participants of both initiatives cite consciousness-raising as one of their most important tasks – and people's apathy as one of the main obstacles. An interesting question is, what can explain this shift in the development of post-socialist civil societies? It could be that in the respective economies, the process of concentration of wealth in the hands of few oligarchic groups has largely finished, and the perspectives for a significant redistribution, or the success of economic and political newcomers, is extremely limited. This tendency was probably reinforced by the absence of leftwing political forces that could seriously challenge the economic power of mature oligarchic capitalism and its corruption of the political sphere. Other possible reasons for the transformation of post-Soviet civil societies are the refusal of government agencies to deal with the grievances of the population, their broad incapacity to fulfill even their own functions (as in the case of environmental bodies), and the scarce efficacy of formal NGOs disembedded from local communities. It is a task for further research to deal with this question and to verify these conjectures.

A few words resulting from e-mail exchanges with participants and web sources remain to be said about how GF survived the period of political turbulence, including the Euro-Maidan and Anti-Maidan protests and the war in Donbas. In 2014 GF was continuing with its usual activities – helping in the struggle against illegal logging in several places of the city, protests against fracking, cleanups (*subbotniks*), attempts at environmental lobbying, etc. It seems that political opportunities, threats and incentives to act did not change much in comparison to the pre-Maidan period. But the divide that had opened in Ukrainian society, particularly visible in Kharkiv, was not avoided by the movement. Cooperation between people with different views on the current political situation had become more difficult, and some supporters of Anti-Maidan, as well as skeptics, left the group. Further, joint pursuit of the environmental agenda was made all the harder when a GF participant was murdered in Kyiv during the Maidan massacre (thus becoming one of the martyrs of the Kharkiv Euro-Maidan), and another was attacked and wounded by government

supporters in Kharkiv. Another important change unfavorable to GF has been the necessity faced by many members to divide their time – this scarce resource of any activist – between environmental activism and volunteer activities to support internally displaced persons, the Ukrainian army, or both. Thus the movement faced external difficulties neither directly involving its strategies nor state repression of environmentalists. In any case the fact that the movement has until now survived the political earthquake has to be seen as a reason for some optimism.

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