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PROTEST PUBLIC AS A SOURCE OF CIVIC INITIATIVES: ON THE EXAMPLE OF MASS PROTESTS IN RUSSIA 2011-2012

Abstract: *The subject of this research is the phenomenon of protest public in the context of its effect the establishment of public civic initiatives in Russia. In the modern society, one of the causes for public gathering is protest. It is the correlation between public gathering and protest activity, with emergence of public civic initiatives within it that becomes the object of author's research. On the example of mass protests in Russia during 2011 and 2012, the author makes an attempt to characterize Russia's protest public and determine the level of its effect upon the formation of new or support of the old civic initiatives. The methodological base for this work consisted of neo-institutional approach, and systemic analysis of the theoretical sources. Empirical foundation for this research is built on the data from social polling and materials of applied research on the protests of 2011-2012. Emergence of the public allowed realizing the attempt for basic request of solution to pressing issues. Despite the certain level of the diversity in its participants and inconsistency of this public, we can still underline the important result of its actions – civic initiatives that have formed within the protest public, which allowed to partially get around the closed nature of Russia's political system. The author comes to a conclusion that in the conditions of lack of channels for influencing policy, realization of alternate initiatives that are formulated based on the realistic request of the citizens, rather than the will of the branches of government, remains one of a few mechanisms of public politics within the country.*

Keywords: *Public policy, Civil society, Civic initiatives, Protest public, Democracy, Civic participation, Protests, Policy, State, Values.*

Аннотация: *Предметом исследования настоящей статьи является феномен протестной публики в контексте её влияния на формирование низовых гражданских инициатив в России. Одной из причин возникновения публики в современном мире выступает протестная активность. Именно её связь с формированием публики и возникновением в её среде гражданских низовых инициатив рассматривает автор в настоящей статье. В этой работе, на примере массовых протестов 2011-2012 годов в России, предпринята попытка охарактеризовать российскую протестную публику и выявить степень влияния этой публики на формирование новых или поддержку старых гражданских инициатив. Методологическую основу данного исследования составляют неинституциональный подход и системный анализ теоретических источников. Эмпирическая база исследования основана на данных социологических опросов и материалах прикладных исследований протестов 2011-2012 годов. Появление публики позволило осуществить попытки реализации низового запроса на решение актуальных проблем. Несмотря на определённую степень неоднородности состава участников и непостоянство этой публики, можно выделить важный результат её действий – гражданские инициативы, сформировавшиеся в среде протестной публики, и позволяющие частично обойти закрытость российской политической системы. Автор приходит к выводу, что в условиях нехватки каналов воздействия на политику, реализация подобных альтернативных инициатив, сформулированных не по воле органов государственной власти, а исходя из реального запроса самих граждан, остаётся одним из немногих механизмов публичной политики в стране.*

Ключевые слова: *Публичная политика, Гражданское общество, Гражданские инициативы, Протестная публика, Демократия, Гражданское участие, Протесты, Политика, Государство, Ценности.*

Formation of public and the role of protests within this process

New media and information technologies have changed the traditional perception of public sphere, opening a number of innovative

opportunities for civic participation. In addition to that, new problems are emerging that attract an increased public attention, for example environment, human rights, and access to global scarce resources. Many of these problems in turn become the cause for emergence of new subjects of public policy, various types of public, which

influence formation of the agenda on a local and national scale. In many modern countries such manifestations of public participation begin to replace the classic forms of social movements that act in the interest of the public. It does not go unnoticed by the authorities, who begin to implement new strategies for cooperation not only with public in general, but also with some of its representatives. But if in the countries with fairly long-standing traditions of democratic system inclusion of the public in formation and development of policymaking represents the answer to the challenges of any modern nation, in the countries with an authoritarian or unstable democratic regimes, the public ends up forced to look for ways to involve itself into public policy on its own ^{[1, p. 117],[2, p. 86]}. Moreover, it is namely as the result of this search that it becomes a public. Separate, and often diverse groups of citizens, begin to solidarize in order to be heard by the government. As rightly noted by Philipp Koh, public participation cannot take place under the conditions of “institutional vacuum”. Even if the country does not have established institutions through which the citizens could take realistic part in the political process, if there is a significant enough public inquiry for such participation, the structures for governmental relations will undoubtedly emerge ^[3, p. 7]. One of the natural attempts to search for strategies of participation becomes the protest activity. The protest agenda possesses a serious mobilization potential, and even smooths out contradictions that inevitably appear during such mobilization. Thus the protest becomes an attempt of the citizens to not only express their opinion regarding some type of events or actions taken by the authorities, but also a forum for formation of a community that could be characterized as public ^[4, p. 227].

Over the recent years, the protest public as a special community of citizens that expresses itself in a public realm has manifested itself in various countries of the world. In light of the mass protest activity in the recent time we can speak of formation of a special type of publics, ones that are directly linked to the protests that feed their ability to exist and develop. Over the period from 2006 to 2013 the world witnessed a significant growth in protest activity: from events of the “Arab Spring” and the “Indignados” movement in Spain and countries of Latin America, to the international “Occupy” movement. Throughout history there have been periods when great masses of people rose up against established orders, demanding changes, for example, in 1848, 1917, and 1968; but today we are experiencing a new era of mass protests, marked by a local civic involvement. According to the research by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation: “Our analysis of 843 protest events reflects a steady increase in the overall number of protests every year, from 2006 (59 protests) to mid-2013 (112 protests

events in only half a year). Following the onset of the global financial and economic crisis began to unfold, there is a major increase in protests beginning 2010 with the adoption of austerity measures in all world regions. Protests are more prevalent in higher income countries (304 protests), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (141 protests), East Asia and the Pacific (83 protests) and Sub-Saharan Africa (78 protests). An analysis of the Middle East and North Africa region (77 protests) shows that protests were also prevalent prior to the Arab Spring” ^[5, p.3]. It cannot be claimed that each protest forms its public, as it cannot be claimed that any mass protest activity over the last few years bases strictly on the public. The public must meet a number of criteria. For example, Nina Y. Belyaeva highlights 8 of its most characteristic features:

- Informedness
- Competence
- Involvement
- Interest
- Freedom of thought, opinion, and action
- Cohesion into a group
- Readiness to act ^{[6, p. 75-77],[7, p/ 21-25]}.

In this work, we would like to underline the connection between the protest activity and the formation of public, with emergence of public civic initiatives within them. On the example of the mass protests of 2011-2012 in Russia, we will attempt to characterize Russian protest public and determine its role in the formation of new (or support of the old) civic initiatives.

Protest public in Russia

One of the countries that have directly experienced the increased protest activity is Russia. Throughout the late 2000’s the divide between the authority and the active, educated, and more informed part of the population was growing, and has reached its peak during the period between parliamentary elections of 2011 and presidential elections of 2012. According to the Moscow Helsinki Group, over nine months of 2011 Russia saw 702 public protests, attended by 97,043 people ^[8, p. 3-4]. The protest agenda included demands for fair elections, strengthening the resolve to fight corruption and growth in prices for utilities, environmental problems, as well as demonstrations within the framework of Strategy-31 for protection of the freedom of assembly. There were also protests related to the continuing incarceration of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, as well as in support of the jailed activists of “The Other Russia” political party ^[9, p. 11]. Nevertheless, prior to December 2012 the protests did not pose any real threat, since majority of the citizens did not participate, and the activists did not produce a great social resonance ^[10, p.81].

The significance of 2011 became the growing realization of their rights among the citizens, and the activists stopped being afraid to hold unsanctioned protests. During some months the coefficient of sanctioned and unsanctioned protests was roughly the same, and hardly any arrests were made at the unsanctioned acts of protest. We can note to resonating protest that concluded without the involvement of police – demonstration of solidarity with the Belarussian opposition, which took place outside the Belarus embassy in Moscow, and the protest demanding to resignation of the Minister of Transport Igor Levitin ^[8, p. 3].

Among majority of the citizens the sense of assurance from economic stability were beginning to be replaced by the feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty with regards to their future, brought by the global economic crisis, which strongly reflected on the Russian economy ^[10, p. 105-107]. Moreover, there were new emotional reactions rising among the people: desire to defend their dignity, and disagreement with the assessment of the current economic state of the country that was being reported by the mass media. There were also the traces of social polarization: if prior to 2008 Vladimir Putin had a stable high support rating, in the period from 2008 to 2011, we could see a formation of a certain Putin “anti-electorate”. His rating among the population began to decline, and in the second quarter of 2011 has reached a 5-year low (see Table 1). Nevertheless, no one, including sociologists, could foresee the coming mass protests following the elections, since majority of the citizens who were displeased with the situation did not plan to take any action and did not even vote during the elections, while the ruling party utilized its administrative and propaganda apparatus to mobilize the citizens of rural areas, retirees, and other dependent or politically neutral social groups.

Only after the fact the sociologists have come to a conclusion that the social mobilization commenced just 2-3 weeks prior to the elections, when part of the population felt disappointed by the decision of Vladimir Putin to run for office, and it became clear that there will be no desired changes in the country’s politics, while the elections themselves will most likely become just a decoration, to give legitimacy to the already predetermined political landscape by the powers that be ^[10, p. 70].

Another important element that gave the protests the significance was the problem of political representation. The citizens did not see representation of their interests within the existing political parties, and it was characteristic for the entire political system, including the opposition as a part of it. People’s distrust towards the current politicians and existing political parties (parliament and “non-systemic”) can be seen in the results of the polls during demonstrations, from in-depth interviews with the activists, as well as nationwide public opinion polls ^[9, p. 12-14]. Thus, during the summer of 2011 when only 5% believed that the “Yabloko” party represents the interests of the entire nation, 3% – interests of the working class, 3% – interests of the underprivileged, and 7% believed that the party represents the interests of the middle class. For the “Right Cause” party, these numbers were 4%, 5%, 2%, and 6% respectively. The parties that positioned themselves as liberal turned out to be unattractive even for those groups of citizens that usually regard themselves as middle class. For comparison: corresponding indexes for the “United Russia” party, which significantly damaged its image among the voters due to corruption scandals and a number of controversial legislative bills, still amounted to 20%, 11%, 3%, and 16% respectively. The acquired data corresponds with the main complaints towards the

Do you approve of Vladimir Putin’s actions as president? (Table 1)

Year	Yes, I approve (%)	No, I disapprove (%)
2008	83	14
2009	80	18
2010	77	19
2011 1 st quarter	71	26
2011 2 nd quarter	68	30
2011 3 rd quarter	63	34
2012 1 st quarter	65	31
2012 2 nd quarter	66	32
2012 3 rd quarter	65	34
2013 1 st quarter	64	34
2013 2 nd quarter	63	36
2013 3 rd quarter	62	37
2014 1 st quarter	70	26
2014 2 nd quarter	84	14
2014 3 rd quarter	85	11

non-systemic opposition: “They only speak, but do not act”, “They do not represent our interests”^{[11],[12, p. 59]}. For most Russians the word “opposition” is synonymous, first and foremost, with the names of few Russian politicians, who previously held high posts in the Russian government: Boris Nemtsov, Mikhail Kasyanov, and Vladimir Ryzhkov. But the public opinion polls subsequently revealed that majority of Russians were not prepared to vote for the opposing politicians, claiming that they “have no influence upon the situation”, “will not unite”, and “do not represent my interests”^[9, p. 15]. If writers, journalists, and other public associated with culture were highlighting and stating that they do not represent someone’s specific interests and only support the movement, form ideas, etc., then the opposing politicians just had to express someone else’s opinion. The fact they had partially taken leading roles in the protests is explained by the emptiness of the field of Russia’s public policy, and not their mobilization capabilities or broad support of the political forces that they represented^{[9, p. 18],[12, p. 61]}.

In addition to distrust towards the government and search for alternative sources of information, the key element of the emerging public became the politicization of previously apolitical public figures. Their attention was primarily focused on the electoral institution in Russia, and honest vote counts. In November of 2011, along with the general information awareness and the ability to competently process this information, this focus transformed into action: more and more ordinary citizens, who did not belong to any political party, began to register as volunteer observers to monitor the elections. This can be characterized as the first manifestation of Russian public, diverse in the type of its participants and interests, without general geographical ties, but nevertheless, finding solidarity in the fight for their right to fair elections. The public began to display its key characteristics; people were ready to join the action; they formed a common discourse and were solidary in their assessment of the events. Having started to take real action, they also met the responsibility of not only organizing the protests, forming unions and spreading information, but were also ready to suffer the inconveniences brought by the external pressure. Using social networks and other internet platforms, the public mobilization was gaining a serious scale and level of organization. On December 5 of 2011, the day after elections, Russian opposition parties scheduled a demonstration that was agreed upon with the authorities in advance, and was estimated to be attended by 300 participants^[13]. From the low declared number of participants it is evident just how little its organizers counted on support, as well as demonstrates

the state of the opposition. But the political parties were not prepared for the scale of the protest that has already been established in the demonstrations of citizens. Even on the evening of December 4, when the preliminary results of the elections were announced, people coordinated through the social media and held an unsanctioned protest at the Clear Ponds in Moscow. The scheduled December 5 meeting was attended by a significantly larger number of participants, according to various estimates between 2,000 and 10,000 people^[14]. At the same time, it is worth noting that the people who took part in the protest were not supporters of the presented opposition parties. The majority of them were the city dwellers, who felt insulted and disappointed due to electoral fraud that a number of them were witness to, being the observers at the elections. Since they were prepared to turn their frustration into action, the most logical step seemed the participation in the protest, even if under a banner of the oppositional political forces.

As to the composition of the regular participants, the demonstrations at the Clear Ponds and Bolotnaya Square on December 10 consisted primarily of youth. However, at the protests on December 24 at the Academician Sakharov Avenue, and February 4 of 2012 march through Yakimanka, as well as the second demonstration on the Bolotnaya Square were attended mostly by middle-aged citizens, according to the polls conducted by the Levada Center. The youngest participants (18-24) comprised only 20% of those gathered, same goes for the older age group (55 and above). If we compare this with the general national demographic, among the participants of the protest the people with higher education made up about 80% of the attendees (national average – less than 1/3), majority of whom were men (approximately 65%), while majority of the population is women. The predominant group at the protests in December and February were people who could be regarded as members of the various categories of middle class – people with higher education and income above national average (roughly 65%). For comparison: in Moscow such group comprises about half of the population (50-51%), while in Russia – only approximately 1/5 of total population (22%). The three least privileged groups combined equaled to 28% of the attendees at the December protest, and 32% at the February protest. We should note that approximately half of the capital’s residents (49%) are low-income families, while on the nationwide scale it is the majority of the population (79%). At the same time, the participants themselves did not consider all those involved as a few social groups that are close to each other; for them, the demonstration was attended by “all” or “very diverse people”^[9, p. 21-23].

Civic initiatives of the protest public in Russia: search for alternate mechanisms of participation

Under the circumstances where Russian political and social reality is characterized by a rather small number of generally accessible channels for expression of opinion and influence upon the agenda, the protest activity becomes a unique mechanism that allows the citizens to discover for themselves the practice of participation, without experiencing the problems related with already formed negative experience. In addition to that, having started to participate in the protests and the related public initiatives, one man makes a contribution into proliferation of a network of people involved into similar practices. This, among other things, allows to partially overcome the phenomenon of “slacktivism” or “failure” of social mobilization, when people formally support any initiatives on the Internet or social networks, but do not participate in them. In this work we highlight few vectors of civic activity that have been realized either by Russian protest public directly, or with its active involvement. The chronological timeframe starts with the third quarter of 2011, which marked the beginning of the first mobilization, and remains open as some of the initiatives are still being worked on today. We propose the following list with general vectors of civic initiatives:

- Monitoring elections; the movement for fair elections
- Social volunteering; help in the regions affected by natural disasters
- Legal aid for people arrested for participating in a protest
- Initiatives on monitoring the conditions of inmates of Russian prisons

At the beginning stages of protests the most evident manifestation of attempts of civic participation became the serious involvement into the work of monitoring elections: parliamentary, presidential, and regional. Sharing the testimonies of witnessed election fraud on the Internet, they gradually “convoked” the public, turning their attention to the pressing issue that can unite even the most diverse participants. On the wave link of common concern with the topic of elections emerged initiative projects for election monitoring, participation in election commissions, and training of the monitoring staff: “League of Voters”, “Citizen Monitor”, and “Rosvybory”^[15, p. 8]. These types of initiatives were getting support, attracted volunteers and individual activists, and coordinated funding using the social networks. Overall, we can note that the phenomenon of ideological election monitoring, when ordinary people decided to become observers due to distrust towards the local election commissions and the central election

committee, is something completely new to Russia^[15]. Prior to 2011, parties that took part in election monitoring and people who worked as monitors were purely financially-driven. In 2011, a great number of people turned out to be interested in monitoring the electoral institution in the country for completely other reasons – people wanted transparent and understandable elections, real competition, and absence of serious violations^[10]. For the first time since the beginning of 1990’s the elections gained recognition as an important mechanism, which carries out the representation of interests of various groups of citizens, as it should be in any democratic country. The divergence between expectations and reality, as well as the closed nature of Russia’s political system did not leave many “ways” for civic participation. The public control and monitoring over the elections were one of them.

Within the history of modern Russia there are not many episodes of mass public initiatives, which would be built upon civic enthusiasm, and at the same time did not use government support. In the case of citizen monitoring we can see one of those few such initiatives that has actually led to certain important results. Before the presidential elections on March 4 of 2012, a social network “Civil Control” was formed by the efforts of few students and graduates of the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, which united the monitors from various parts of the country, allowing them to share experience and upload information about violations during the campaigns and elections^[16]. Namely the growing concern of citizens towards elections has forced the government to take additional measures to increase transparency and openness of the electoral procedures. President’s Executive Order prior to the March 4 elections proposed equipping the polling stations with cameras and the capability to stream the process online. The government needed to demonstrate the fairness of the entire process, since this was the main presidential candidate was Vladimir Putin, and his decisive, and more importantly, fair victory had to demonstrate the unity of the Russian people and disprove the claims of the protest public.

Another prime example is the participation of the protest public in the events that took place in Astrakhan after the mayoral elections in the spring of 2012. At that time, a member of the parliamentary political party “A Just Russia” Oleg Shein was one of the candidates for mayor of Astrakhan. The elections were held in the city on the same day as presidential elections, the fact that at first partially obscured this story on the federal level. After the count, Mikhail Stolyarov from the “United Russia” party was declared winner^[17]. Based on the official data, Stolyarov received 60% of the votes, while Shein received 30%. Meanwhile, Shein was leading

not only based on social polls conducted right before the elections, but also according to the exit polls. An additional reason for suspecting foul play emerged when the results of the candidates per station were published. Shein won the majority at the polling stations that had automated vote count ^[18]. He went on a hunger strike demanding publishing of the results and annulment of the results of the election. At this stage the protest was joined by members of protests from other cities across Russia; after the opposition politicians were able to win the elections in cities like Yaroslavl and Tolyatti, there was hope that in Astrakhan the opposition will also be able to compete with the ruling party. A request was filed with the prosecutor's office for verification of the presented evidence of violations. During this time Shein and a number of his supporters continued the hunger strike, while the streets of Astrakhan had demonstrators and picketing for fair elections and a recount, alongside the members of mass protests and activists who have come to the city to give support. Such civil activity forced the court to review this case, but the results of the investigation only yielded seven violations of electoral legislation, and five administrative cases. Majority of the arguments on violation of electoral legislation cited by Shein in his complaint to the prosecutor's office, according to the court decision did not have objective proof. Nevertheless, the public was able to at least attract the attention to the problem on the federal level, succeed in getting a court review, and prove that even in the regions the protest political activity is possible.

The next chronological manifestation of mass civil participation became the volunteer movement for providing aid to those who suffered from the Krymsk flood. In May of 2012 due to heavy downpours a dam ruptured outside the city of Krymsk in Krasnodar Krai. Nearly almost the entire town became flooded, and the aid came not only from the rescue crews of the EMERCOM, but also from many volunteers, majority of which were coordinated by the civil movement "White Ribbon", which emerged during the protests ^[19]. Since the city and its suburbs received too much humanitarian aid, cooperation of volunteers was especially important, since they were helping sorting, transporting, and distributing the aid. They were able to organize a procedure for controlling and allocating aid where it was needed most. It was through the volunteer network that the information on the most vital types of aid was able to be spread rapidly, and help was provided in finding missing relatives among the victims. The organization's experience acquired during the protests became of utmost importance, since the volunteers already had the knowhow of working with donations, coordination of volunteers, and cooperation

with the branches of government. Krymsk was the most exemplary manifestation of the protest public's participation in volunteer work in the regions suffered from natural disasters. There were other instances, associated for example with the aid to the Far Eastern region during the flood of the Amur River, a number of educational initiatives in the area of protection of human rights and tolerance, as well as organization of volunteers to visit orphanages and nursing homes.

In retrospect to the protests and arrests of the activists an interesting example of responsible civic initiative became the work of attorneys and rights advocates, who offered pro bono consultations and took on the cases of those arrested during the demonstrations. They left their contact information on social networks and made efforts to provide legal aid to the activists. This contributed to the public awareness of the problem of toughening the legislation in the area of public protests, and reassured the protestors that in case of arrest they will not be left one on one with the law enforcement agencies. This assurance was strengthened by the solidarity of the protest public, and the very idea of such help after the arrests during the protest on May 6 of 2012 and the action of the group "Pussy Riot" transformed into a more serious and complex initiative – monitoring of the conditions of inmates, and collection of information on violations of human rights in Russian prisons. The theme of helping political prisoners existed even since the first protest at the end of 2011. Most often it was in relation to the activists of the banned party "The Other Russia", and the figures of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev. These problems gained relevance when several of the activists were detained after the clash with police during the May 6 protest, and received severe prison sentences. It was the time that marked the beginning of the initiatives that later turned into projects: "RosUzник", "6th May Committee", and "The Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners" ^{[20],[21]}. With the help of these platforms the work has begun on providing possible help to the prisoners, and attracting attention of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights towards their problems. Regular volunteers petitioned for permission to visit a number of Russian prisons. After the resonating case and guilty verdict issued to the two female members of the "Pussy Riot" group, the attention towards political prisoners in Russian was also captured in the Western countries, which allowed monitoring the fate of the prisoners and ensure that they would avoid the fate of Sergei Leonidovich Magnitsky. His figure became the symbol for a prisoner who suffered from the Russian penitentiary system, and was used by the US legislators to form the list of Russian persons against whom they have issued sanctions ^[22].

Conclusion

It is worth noting that such spontaneous outburst of civil activity had dual consequences. On one hand, the “convocation” of public in one way or another contributed to the strengthening of the horizontal connections within the society and allowed gaining the experience of participation in the realization of public civic initiatives. The original construct of the social network that formed as a result of collaborated actions jump started the mechanisms of recruiting and informing the previously apolitical citizens, strengthening the solidarity within the public. Having the desire to influence the situation in the country and not finding any realistic ways of doing so in the presence of only the mechanisms formed by the government, the citizens were attempting to launch their own projects, aimed at resolving the problems that they felt were of most importance. As a result, we could see some of the fruit of their efforts, which became extremely important, as it allowed the citizens to gain the experience of involvement into public policy and public action.

On the other hand, the lack of visible positive results of some projects, as well as the pressure from the outside and increase of polarization of attitudes in the society fueled by the government, also created the negative experience, which later forced part of the public to forgo participation in any demonstrations or civil activity outside the government channels. It is also worth noting that during the protests, the Russian society faced significant division in opinions with regards to the point of the protests and participation therein, as well as support of the government. For example, according to the poll conducted among Russian volunteers (technically, people who are prepared to take civil action), more than 60% have spoken out against protest as means of influencing policy, and do not see themselves as participants of such acts. In addition to that, they separate the civic activity from politics, underlining that the former is meant to do “good deeds”, while the latter should be handled by professionals^[23, p. 77]. Irina Albertovna Khaliy in her research on the civic initiatives in Russia highlights

the “conflicting” and “supporting” civic initiatives with regards to decisions of the authorities. She notes that over the recent years the number of the former is diminishing due to the growing external pressure, which impedes their successful realization^[24, p. 43]. Under the conditions of the stricter government policy and increased control over the independent civic unions, often only the initiatives related to social or medical aid, which are politically neutral or loyal to the authorities, can be realized by the efforts of local communities. Unfortunately, this contributes to the formation of a certain “survival instinct”, which excludes any organized actions that can cause dissatisfaction of the government.

On the reviewed examples we can see that the protests became sort of a foundation for a number of civic initiatives of social and political type, but in Russia this process is limited to large cities. Within Russian regions the protest mobilization and solidarity with the protest public have manifested only sporadically, which can be explained based on the social composition of the participants of the protest that differs from the national average. An important role here was played by the disparity in the level of income, level of education, and level of information awareness. Nevertheless, the protest activity contributed to the “crystallization” of the protest public in Russia through participation in the common goal, joint acts, and forming discourse. In addition to that, the protests revealed a high level of distrust towards the existing political institutions, powers, and parties. The “game rules” that have formed within the Russia’s political system and government’s efforts to control civic initiatives, required the protest public to take some actions in order to realize the request for participation. In the situation when the number of possible mechanisms for civil participation in the country is severely limited, and those that are left were focused on legitimizing decisions of the government and support of some state, rather than public projects, the protest public formed alternate projects that would be aimed at attempting to resolve issues that they find relevant.

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