By the time Vladimir Putin began his first term as president of Russian, in early 2000, most analysts were lamenting the demise of Russian civil society. In late 2011, as he prepared to return to the Kremlin for a third term, the same analysts were surprised by the resurgence of grassroots protest. A narrative expressed in terms of success and failure, relying on a normative vocabulary and static analytical concepts, cannot, I argue, make sense of that progression. A more coherent narrative—which this article attempts to present—would look to concepts of interaction, in which citizens and the state are seen as constituting one another through a complex series of social and political engagements. Such a narrative, moreover, must not begin in 2000, but must look further back into history, elucidating the co-evolution of Soviet and then post-Soviet state and society over the past twenty years. In this view, then, the decline of civil society in the 1990s can be seen as accompanying the disintegration of the institutions of state-society interaction, while the reemergence of civic activism in more recent years comes hand in hand with the consolidation of authoritarian governance.

Keywords: Civil society, Russia, State, governance

En el momento en que Vladímir Putin iniciaba su primer mandato como presidente de Rusia, a principios de 2000, muchos analistas se lamentaban de la desaparición de la sociedad civil rusa. A finales de 2011, cuando Putin se prepara para un tercer mandato presidencial, los mismos analistas se han visto sorprendidos por el resurgimiento de protestas ciudadanas. Con una narrativa expresada en términos de éxito y fracaso, dependiente de un vocabulario normativo y conceptos analíticos estáticos, no se puede dar sentido a esa evolución. Una narrativa más coherente, como la que se trata de presentar en este artículo, debe echar mano de conceptualizaciones sobre las interacciones, en las que los ciudadanos y el Estado son vistos como mutuamente constituyentes a través de una serie de imbricaciones sociales y políticas complejas. Una narrativa así, además, no debe partir del año 2000, sino retrotraerse más allá en la historia, dilucidando la evolución en los últimos veinte años tanto del Estado soviético y postsoviético como de la propia sociedad. De esta manera, el declinar de la sociedad civil en los años noventa puede entenderse, entonces, como paralelo a la desintegración de las instituciones donde interactuaban el Estado y la sociedad, y el resurgir del activismo cívico en años recientes como correspondiente a la consolidación del autoritarismo.

Palabras clave: Sociedad civil, Rusia, Estado, gobernanza
In 1991, civil society in Russia died together with the Soviet Union. Twenty
years later, as the Russian ruling elite reconsolidates a new authoritarian state, a new
Russian civil society is being reborn alongside it. This, I argue, is no coincidence,
but a natural phenomenon: civil society, tasked with mediating between citizens and
their state, cannot evolve without a consolidated state and, when it does evolve, it
inevitably reflects the contours of that state. The question for the coming decade,
however, is whether this new civil society is sufficient to challenge authoritarian gov-
ernance, in line with normative democratic theory, or whether indeed it will support
the further entrenchment of illiberal rule.

By the time Vladimir Putin began his first term as president of Russia in 2000
most analysts were already lamenting the demise of Russian civil society. Most promi-
nently, Marc Morje Howard bemoaned the “weakness of civil society in post-commu-
nist Europe” – and in Russia in particular – noting that the failure of Russians (and
others) to join civic groups and voluntary organizations reflected legacies of mistrust
inherited from the communist past (Howard, 2003). In this conclusion he was joined
by Stephen Fish (1995 and 2005), Richard Rose (1999) and others, although with
some degree of nuance as to the cause of the generally agreed-upon ‘failure’. Certainly,
by midway through Putin’s first term, it was difficult to find any analyst claiming
that Russian civil society was alive and kicking (the most notable exceptions being
Javeline and Lindemann-Komarova, 2010). To be sure, non-governmental organiza-
tions proliferated, some funded by the Russian state, some by Western governments
and donors, with most of the latter pursuing a normative, democratic agenda, in
defense of human rights, women’s and minority rights, the environment and other
causes, with varying degrees of success and varying levels of attachment to local
constituencies within Russia itself (see Ottaway and Carothers, 2000; and Evans et
al, 2006).

Yet early in Putin’s second term, a new civil society appeared to be in emergence.
Fledgling, atomized and weak, grassroots movements – often without structure, fund-
ing or even clear leadership – arose across the country and on a range of issues. Thus,
motorists upset about regulations banning right-side-drive cars and other limita-
tions, homeowners angered by threats to their neighborhoods, defrauded investors
and ordinary citizens abused by the police began drawing tentative lines in the sand
and, remarkably, the state and its representatives very often backed down (Greene,
2006 and 2007). Unrest eventually spread to labor as well, with a wave of strikes
in 2005-2007 affecting automotive, shipping, consumer goods, metals and mining
and other industries across Russia (Greene and Robertson, 2010). Common to all
of these movements was a sense of justice, a claim that the state was infringing upon
citizens’ most fundamental rights to live and pursue relative prosperity generally free
of predation. The same basic claim emerges in more recent mobilizations, whether involving environmentalists, anti-corruption activists, civil rights campaigners or, once again, motorists.

In seeking to explain this phenomenon, I am guided not by normative civil society theory or its allies in the modernization literature but by two separate but related bodies of work. The first is social movement theory – more a set of analytical tools than a comprehensive theory, on the face of it – which defines a social movement as “a sustained interaction between a specific set of authorities and various spokespersons for a given challenge to those authorities” (Tilly, 1984), in which “actions affect other actions: actions are not just isolated, independent responses to external economic or political conditions – rather, one action changes the likelihood of subsequent actions” (Oliver and Myers, 2003). Thus, rather than analyzing organizations such as NGOs, as is common in the traditional civil society literature, my focus is on social movements as interactions between citizens and their states – which, after all, is how civil society has been defined, going back to the Enlightenment – and hence on the ways in which that interaction is structured (or not structured) and evolves over time (or doesn’t). The second body of literature is most succinctly summed up by Joel Migdal, who argues that states and societies evolve together and likewise puts the emphasis on “process – on the ongoing struggles among shifting coalitions over the rules for daily behavior. These processes determine how societies and states create and maintain distinct ways of structuring day-to-day life – the nature of the rules that govern people’s behavior, whom they benefit and whom they disadvantage, which sorts of elements unite people and which divide them, what shared meaning people hold about their relations with others and about their place in the world. And these processes also ordain the ways that rules and patterns of domination and subordination are challenged and change” (Migdal, 2001).

This, then, provides the basis in theory (based in turn on prior observation) for the expectation that Russian civil society should indeed develop hand-in-hand with its state – even if that state is authoritarian. If civil society is a means of collective appeal by citizens to the state, it must necessarily reflect the state, which itself is a reflection of the means and ends of power as perceived by the elite. But, as Tilly, Migdal and others suggest, once institutionalized and engrained in patterns of social interaction, the structures of civil society have the potential to become binding for the state itself, although the theory is neutral as to whether that binding is of a democratic or authoritarian nature. To understand where we are in the development of Russian civil society, however, and thus to answer those questions, it would be useful first to review how we got here, and that story begins in the Soviet Union.
FROM WHENCE WE CAME: THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE

In June 1977, on the eve of the adoption of a new constitution, 57 dissidents signed an open letter intended for publication in Pravda (though it was not actually published), calling for a general amnesty of political prisoners. But although they remained important to the movement, such letters and petitions became overshadowed over the course of the 1970s by attempts to instigate international pressure on the Soviet government. This trend was strengthened in large part by the Soviet Union’s accession to the Helsinki Final Act on human rights, which gave the movement (in the form of the Helsinki monitoring groups) a lever to push for external pressure. Thus, the regime became increasingly concerned not by the dissidence of the activists concentrated in the human rights movement, but by their ability to funnel information to the West through foreign journalists and diplomats.

Accordingly, in January 1980 the Politburo exiled the prominent human rights activists Andrei Sakharov and his wife Elena Bonner to Gorkii, with the explicit aim of disrupting their communication with Westerners. Across the spectrum of organized dissidence, those not lucky enough to be endowed with a Nobel Peace Prize were imprisoned, including such prominent figures as the Helsinki activist Tat’iana Osipova, the Jewish leaders Natan Shcharanski and Iurii Orlov, and Leonard Ternovskii, a leading activist in the Working Commission on psychiatry. If the KGB in the late 1970s was capable of taking a somewhat philosophical view of the dissident challenge, in the early 1980s it showed very little tolerance. Throughout the period from 1981 to 1984, the KGB reported that, despite their internal exile, Sakharov and Bonner continued to serve as a key hub of the opposition, and it requested and won permission to further restrict their movements and communication. The KGB resorted to less formal methods of pressure as well, including arranging for death threats against Sakharov and Bonner and nighttime visits by drunken, armed ‘workers’ who expressed their indignation at the dissidents’ ‘treason’.

1. All of the footnoted references to archival materials are drawn from the Andrei Sakharov Archive in Moscow and use that Archive’s notation. When quotations are presented, they are as translated into English by the author. PA 95: f. 3, op. 80, d. 642, l. 22-23
2. PA 99: f. 3, op. 80, d. 642, l. 59-67 (TsK KPSS, 3 Jan. 1980, Protocol No. 177)
4. ARS 00385: f. 1, op. 3, ed khr. 38, doc. 4
The increased difficulty and risk faced by the dissidents was to some degree counterbalanced by the increased leverage that their plight gave them internationally. The exile of Sakharov and Bonner led to a flood of letters of protest from foreign leaders, and, to the dismay of the Kremlin, the resulting diplomatic discussions generally strayed into the fate of other dissidents and the movements they represented. The growing number of prominent dissidents in exile or prison likewise combined with the regime’s growing intransigence vis-à-vis increased support in Western capitals for the enforcement of such human rights-oriented measures as the U.S. Jackson-Vanik amendment. Still, as long as the regime was intransigent both domestically and internationally, the movement was powerless to alter the status quo. Neither domestic appeals nor international pressure was able to win the release of dissidents, much less the enactment of reforms. In essence, each day that a dissident remained free was a victory and very little else could be hoped for. In this context, dissidents took moral solace in their activism, arguing that victory lay not in the achievement of goals, but in the sheer refusal to remain silent. Thus, in an open letter protesting the arrest of Tat’iana Osipova, a group of dissidents wrote:

“All of her ‘activities’ flow from natural human qualities: honesty, kindness, mercy, sympathy. And from the unique strength of her moral position, the essence of which is extremely simple: every person bears the responsibility for what goes on around them. Knowing that someone else is in need, it is impossible not to attempt to help him. Tania ‘simply’ does that which she cannot do. That is the will of her moral debt”.

Less than a year after Osipova’s arrest, Leonard Ternovskii captured the spirit of the human rights movement in a closing statement at his court trial, so telling that I present it virtually in full:

“When this trial ends, it will be too late to explain why I chose this path that has brought me to the defendant’s bench. I would like people to understand me. And the court should not be uninterested in the motives of the defendant. What brought me into the ranks of those who some call rights-defenders and others outcasts?”

5. See, for example: PA 109: f. 3, op. 108, d. B.6.9.4.1/1, l. 28-29; PA 110: f. 3, op. 108, d. B.6.9.4.1/1, l. 30-31; PA 115: f. 3, op. 108, d. B.6.9.4.1/1, l. 81-82
6. ARS 01338: f. 1, op. 3, ed. khr. 37, doc. 3
I began to become convinced of the fatality of silence in the face of injustice in large part under the influence of the documents of the 20th CPSU Congress. Nineteen-fifty six became the year of my civic awakening. I understood that, no matter how small I may be within my country, I am still responsible for everything that happens in it. But that was still just a way of thinking. Rejecting in principle any path that involved violence, I could not see any opportunities for meaningful protest.

In the late 1960s, I met people who began to speak out openly against that which they felt unjust. The fact that they chose as their weapon words and only words, as well as the bravery of their speech, evoked my sympathy and respect. I saw that injustice could be opposed by bravery and the open word.

Today, I am accused because of my public work, which I call the defense of rights, but which the prosecution calls the distribution of slanderous thoughts. I participated in the work of the Commission on psychiatry, signed numerous documents and petitions. I have already said that I am convinced of their truth. But why did I do it? Did I hope, in so doing, to correct what I was fighting against, to help those on behalf of whom I was speaking out? Of course, I wanted my words to be listened to, and I was happy when we were able to improve someone’s fate. But everything in life is more complicated. The experience of many years shows that our protests are most often unable to eliminate any particular evil. But, nonetheless, I do not consider these appeals and protests to have been useless. Even without bringing visible benefit, I believe that a protest against injustice heals society. There must be people in the country who are ready to stand up for justice. And, if necessary, to go to prison for it.

As a doctor, I felt a particular responsibility for what was being done in the name of medicine. I became convinced that the abuse of psychiatry does take place and that such abuses must be battled. So, after the arrest of Aleksandr Podrabinek, when the only free member of the Commission remaining was Viacheslav Bakhmin, I joined the Commission.

I would rather that there were no need for my actions and appeals. Rights and the law are meant to be defended first and foremost by prosecutors and the other organs of jurisprudence. If they would do so regularly and diligently, there would be no need for rights-defenders.

I saw my arrest and this trial coming. Of course, that does not mean that I aimed to go to prison. I am nearly 50 years old, not 15, and I have no need of such romanticism. I would prefer to avoid years of imprisonment. But to compromise, for that sake, that which I consider my duty, I believe would be dishonorable.
I will now listen to your verdict. After all, my sentence will also be an unwilling recognition of the significance of what I did and said. And my future rehabilitation is just as inevitable as today’s condemnation.
In accordance with my convictions, I tried to fight against injustice, to help people, to do good. That explains my actions and words.
And I go into bondage with a clear conscience.”.7

It was this spirit that fueled the movement through its darkest days. The regime and the movement had fought each other, for all intents and purposes, to a standoff; the movement was powerless to alter the regime, but the regime was also wholly unable to defeat a movement for which any possible outcome represented victory. That situation only began to change when the regime began to reform on its own. In December 1986, Gorbachev’s Politburo, now decked out under the banners of Glasnost’ and Perestroika, discussed whether to bring Sakharov out of exile:

_Gorbachev_: Yes, we should send Comrade Marchuk to him and tell him that the academics have spoken to the Soviet leadership and the leadership instructed them to speak with him, in order that he return to a normal life. Tell him that the past should be closed. The country has begun a gigantic creative project. Ask him what he thinks about devoting his knowledge and energy to the service of the country and the people.

_Gromyko_: That’s good, principled.

_…_

_Cherbikov_: But he said in one of his letters … that he would not be able to keep silent when silence is anathema.

_Gorbachev_: Let him talk. If he must speak out against the people, then let him deal with it himself. So, comrades, does anybody have any questions?

_Politburo members_: It will bring rewards for us.8

According to Grigorii Marchuk, the academic who was sent by the Politburo to negotiate with Sakharov, the latter was astounded by Gorbachev’s initiative.9 Clearly, Sakharov had understood early the differences between Gorbachev and his predecessors and had sent a letter to the new leader asking to be a part of the processes envisioned

---

7. ARS 00377: f. 1, op. 3, ed. khr. 37, doc. 6
8. PA 168: f. 3, op. 120, d. 72, l. 533-535 (TsK KPSS, 1 Dec. 1986)
by Glasnost’ and Perestroika; no such letters had been sent to Andropov or Chernenko. According to Marchuk, however, Sakharov did not expect a positive response from the Kremlin and, as a result, was dumbstruck by the seeming magnitude of the shift that Gorbachev’s invitation represented. After returning to Moscow and reestablishing networks, though, Sakharov and his entourage rapidly went back to their old ways, spending much of 1987 and 1988 compiling lists and demanding the release of the remaining political prisoners.10

As Perestroika progressed, however, the movement proved ill-prepared to come in from the cold. Disagreements that had been overshadowed by the monolithic figure of the regime came to the fore as soon as the discussion turned to strategies for what promised to be a very new Soviet Union. In particular, 1988 saw the creation of two influential new organizations. The first, the Moscow Tribune, was created in the mold of the Committee and the older dissident organizations, bringing together some 130 thinkers for the purpose of discussion and debate.11 In an environment where engagement with the regime could conceivably bring about changes, however, the momentum shifted more toward a new, more dynamic group of organizations, initially led by Memorial, which was created later in the same month. Some 600 people from 58 Soviet cities attended Memorial’s founding congress in Moscow, including virtually all of the most prominent dissidents. What started as a promising initiative, though, descended into fisticuffs.12 Unable to agree on a forward-looking vision, Memorial’s activists were barely able to concur on how to present the crimes of the past (Sakharov, 1990). Human-rights movements outside Russia, such as the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, turned themselves into political parties and lobbied for independence (Lukyanenko, 1991). In December 1989, meanwhile, the remnants of the Committee were transformed into an International Human Rights Information Center.13 In other words, as the regime began to invite the movement to the table, the movement could come up with very little to say.

This fact has been interpreted by many of the analysts mentioned earlier as a failure on the part of Soviet and post-Soviet civil society. In particular, two accusations are leveled, both of which seem unfair. First, dissident leaders are faulted for leaving the supposedly apolitical realm of civil society and entering political society.
This, however, places heavily normative expectations on individuals and initiatives that never sought such a mantle. Recall that the human rights movement in the Soviet Union did not initially intend to be either oppositional or apolitical. When an apolitical, moral stance was adopted – and this was true in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland as much as in the USSR – this was done specifically because the regime left no room for participatory engagement. To upbraid them for abandoning this stance when more direct approaches became available is to confuse the means for the ends.

The second accusation holds that civil society leaders failed to comprehend the changing environment in which they operated and either remained beholden to old, oppositional modes of behavior or concentrated, as did Memorial, on re-evaluating the past rather than developing an agenda for the future. This argument is considerably more complicated than the first and deserves greater attention. It is undoubtedly true that many civil society leaders throughout the post-communist space proved inept in negotiating new realities. Leaders who attempted politics – including Sakharov, Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa – were often bumbling and frequently became unpopular. Organizations such as the Moscow Helsinki Group, while continuing to function in post-Soviet Russia, have lost influence among a public that sees them as increasingly irrelevant and shrill. The same is true of respected dissident newspapers and journals. As the crises have dragged on in these initiatives, they have tried to identify new strategies and issues, in order to regain lost ground. For the most part, they have failed.

It is inappropriate, however, to interpret this as a crisis of civil society. Rather, these crises belong to specific leaders, organizations and initiatives, and their failures are separate. Certain individuals have had trouble changing their habits and attitudes. Others, despite valiant efforts, have been unable to gain the attention of a sufficient constituency among the public. Then again, the relative failures of Memorial and the Moscow Helsinki Group to maintain their prior stature simply suggest that the issues they represent are less relevant to the public than they were in the past. To call this the failure of civil society is to assert that Memorial and the MHG represent certain eternal and immutable values that must always be highly represented by civil society. This approach leaves no room for changing public demands.

The most important point, meanwhile, is the one suggested by theory: the human rights movements, ideationally powerful, morally impeccable and supremely legitimate as they were, died because the state with which they evolved in order to interact ceased to exist. How, after all, could something like samizdat continue to exist after the end of censorship? What would be the purpose? For whom would it be useful? From where would it take its meaning as an act of defiance and moral autonomy?
CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE POST-SOVIET SOCIAL CONTRACT

What does it mean to be a citizen of Russia today? This is a different question from that of what it means to be Russian, with all of the ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and historical attributes that implies. Being a citizen of the Russian Federation carries with it a set of formal rights and responsibilities enshrined in the Constitution and other laws, including those pertaining to voting, military service, social services and so on. Citizenship also carries an inherited attachment to territory, a set of symbols, national sports teams and the like. Certainly, all of these have meaning, but only in the broader and deeper context of the basic nature of the relationship between a Russian citizen and the Russian state. And while that meaning has been shaped over the last twenty years by the way in which the new Russian state has behaved during transition, the meaning of Russian citizenship may by now be argued to have become sufficiently consolidated to shape the future development for the state itself in many respects.

The deeper meaning of citizenship is most often discussed in terms of a social contract, and in Russia that contract is most often conceived of as involving an exchange of political quiescence for prosperity – a bargain generally argued to have been secured during the early Putin era. The challenge is to make that argument fit with what we know about the political economy of that era. Briefly put, rent-seeking is the guiding principle of the contemporary Russian political economy and it informs the peculiar relationship between Russia’s formal and informal institutions. Gaddy and Ickes are only two among the most prominent of numerous scholars who have described the ways in which a rent-seeking elite transformed the chaotic, zero-sum competition of the 1990s into the system of managed competition that has provided a growing elite with a mounting pool of rents since 2000 (Gaddy and Ickes, 2009).

Following Migdal (2001), if Russia has a rent-seeking elite, we might then expect to see a congruent social contract. Beth Mitchneck and others remind us of the importance of one’s workplace for the provision of social services and, indeed, for the maintenance of one’s entire lifestyle during the Soviet period, and have argued that the continual provision of such services through the workplace in the early transition period acted as a brake on labor migration (Mitchneck, 1995). However, the phenomenon of workplace-based provision of social goods and services would also have been affected by the Soviet-era deficit economy, as a result of which the actual acquisition of the social goods and services to which one was nominally entitled was effected through the mobilization of informal institutions, networks and blat. While the transition brought a gradual (though not total) end to the workplace provision of such goods and services, the informal institutions have
remained in place, to such an extent that Russian citizens continue to resort to informal practices to ensure adequate provision of housing, health care and education, at the very least. Aside from continuing to anchor Russians to dying industrial towns such as Pikalevo or Zabaikalsk, such practices are themselves a form of rent extraction. Nonetheless, while Russians may recognize the suboptimal nature of these transactions, they present formidable resistance to rationalizing reforms, such as the introduction of the unified state university entry exam or condominium associations, which would require abandonment of the informal practices that are currently at the core of citizen-state relations.

In 2003, Wegren wrote of the changing relationship of rural Russians to their state, arguing that:

“The nature of the rural social contract changed in three important ways: (1) the ‘contract’ was changed from below, not above; (2) rural households became less dependent upon the state for their income and welfare; and (3) the content of the ‘contract’ changed from the Soviet era exchange of increasing standards of living for quiescence/compliance to increased economic freedom for political quiescence/compliance” (Wegren, 2003).

I would argue that this shift in the social contract – really more of a divorce settlement than a pre-nuptial agreement – pertains not only to rural communities, but rather to the country as a whole, and that the salient point indeed is that the exchange is of quiescence for economic autonomy, not prosperity. And while this autonomy would seem to have been fated, given the state’s inability and unwillingness to hold up its end of the Soviet-era economic and social bargain, the argument takes on a finer point when seen in the context of the atomization of the state-society relationship that is a hallmark of post-Soviet governance. Thus, while the state was no longer in a position to provide relative prosperity as a public good, it remained able to provide and/or impede relative prosperity as an individual (or, sometimes, a club) good. Hence self-interested individuals would refrain from political engagement in order to ensure the state’s own quiescence or non-interference in that individual’s personal prosperity.

If the social contract is one of non-interference, then loyalty turns out to be remarkably thin in the face of a breach by the state. The evidence for that assertion is not new. Arguably the most successful example of such mobilization began in May 2005, when Vyacheslav Lysakov almost accidentally led a nationwide revolt of motorists, angry over a government plan to ban right-side-drive cars, which would have taken two million automobiles off the streets overnight. Within four days, Lysakov and others brought more than 6,000 cars on to the streets in protest, shutting down traffic in city centers from Moscow to Vladivostok and continued such mobilizations until 2007, protesting any government regulation they felt to be unfair and often forcing the government to back
down (Greene 2010). A key turning point came in early 2006, when the movement, which came to be known as *Svoboda Vybora* (Freedom of Choice), rallied in support of Oleg Shcherbinskii, a driver accused of causing the death of the Altai regional governor, Mikhail Evdokimov, who was killed when Shcherbinskii failed to get out of the way of Evdokimov’s car, which was traveling in Shcherbinskii’s (oncoming) lane. The resulting mobilization not only raised money for Shcherbinskii’s defense but generated so much publicity around the case that he was eventually released and the charges dropped. Most importantly, however, in adopting the slogan “We are all Shcherbinskis” the movement pivoted from reactive to proactive issue-framing and articulated a degree of solidarity theretofore uncharacteristic of Russian protests.

By late 2007, however, Lysakov was widely seen as having been co-opted by the government, given posts on policymaking commissions and encouraged to keep *Svoboda Vybora* off the streets. Social movements, however, transcend organizations, and the movement itself moved on, maintaining the ethos of solidarity and the message that had emerged in the wake of the Shcherbinskii case. Groups such as the Federation of Motorists of Russia (whose Russian acronym, FAR, also means ‘headlight’) and the Blue Bucket Brigades (*Sinie vederki*) have kept up pressure on the government to clamp down on the use of flashing blue lights (*migalki*) that allow seemingly thousands of government officials to disobey traffic regulations and put ordinary people’s lives in danger.

Similarly, the so-called NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) protest movements have been able to move from making particularistic claims about their local quality of life to broader assertions about justice, the rule of law and their rights as citizens. Thus, Evgeniia Chirikova, leader of the movement to defend the old-growth forest in Khimki, outside Moscow, from highway construction, told the magazine *The New Times* the following:

> “You understand, my thinking is absolutely local: in other words, I don’t think in grand terms, like some people do, but in terms of the view out of my window. It is very important to me that I can walk out of my building with my children and find myself in an environmentally sound place. And that no one can take that away from me. My immediate surroundings are very important to me. And when I felt that being taken from me, my consciousness shifted, and I understood that without a normal country you are not guaranteed even your immediate surroundings, and they can take from me anything they want: my business, my child, and not only the environment in which I live. In other words, for me a normal country is one in which my rights are respected” (Al’bats, 2011).
CONCLUSIONS

Certainly, the rhetoric of the new protest movements such as Chirikova’s that have emerged since 2005 and become particularly prominent in recent years is compelling, not least because it is simultaneously authentic and Tocquevillean. (It is also noteworthy how similar Chirikova’s rhetoric sounds to that of Leonard Ternovskii, quoted earlier in this article.) Most of the previous obituaries written for Russian civil society had, after all, identified poor social capital and the anti-liberal legacies of Leninism as the primary causes of death. The fact that grassroots activists, with no prior education in politics and no funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, should have arrived independently at the vocabulary of Locke and Hume is indeed remarkable and puts paid to many of our earlier misconceptions.

Emergence is hardly the end of the story, however. To succeed, Russia’s new activists do not need to overturn the regime. Rather, their implicit task is to provide and prove the worth of an alternative, a vision of state-society relations in which, at least in rare and exceptional cases, officials are bound by law, and citizens empowered by it. The crucial question facing Russia now is whether civil society, such as it is, will define and assert a new meaning for Russian citizenship in which public sovereignty and collective responsibility play a prominent role and a public space is reestablished, or whether the centrifugal inertia of disaffection will prevail and citizenship will continue to be perceived as an accident and a burden rather than a right and an opportunity.

Bibliographical references

Russian Civil Society, 20 Years Later