

## **PROMISE: Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement: Opportunities and challenges for conflicted young people across Europe.**

### **WP6: From Conflict to Innovation: Ethnographic Case Studies**

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## **New pro-citizen activities of young Petersburgers for ‘public morals and order’**

### **Russia**

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#### **Executive summary:**

This case comprises two subcases: ‘opposition activists’; and ‘moral order activists’. These two youth communities (subcases) constitute two types of civic engagement and the empirical data were collected separately by two researchers. The empirical basis of the study consists of 29 in-depth biographical interviews with 19 men and 10 women aged 18 to 39. The interviews were conducted simultaneously with participant observation undertaken during field work (from October 2016 to March 2017).

The analysis shows that the scenes of ‘opposition’ and ‘moral’ activism have similarities and differences. Both groups are to some extent in ‘conflict’ with the current political authorities in Russia. They share a lack of trust in the current regime in Russia and ‘moral’ activists often criticise the government in a similar way to ‘opposition activists’. Regardless of what activists are fighting for, they often share common motivations (professional development, capital accumulation, and social change) and oppose the passive majority. However, it is important to note differences between the groups in terms of their internal hierarchy as well as gender-related contradictions within the groups: the activists’ values do not always correspond to what is actually happening in their communities. Participants of each subcase recognise that it is necessary to act today in order to achieve results in the future. And even ‘small deeds’ prove to be significant for them. The two communities are also not isolated from each other; on the contrary, they display a mutual interest in each other's activities.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the latest studies of youth participation, institutionalised civic engagement and interest in formal politics is on the decline in most European countries and especially among young people (Norris, 2004; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003). On the whole, young people are less involved in formal traditional political institutions and processes – they tend not to vote in elections and or join political parties. In the context of contemporary Russian society in which political and civic participation is widely considered meaningless or dangerous (Krupets *et al.*, 2017), young Russians show less trust in political institutions and in the very possibility of social change via traditional channels (Trofimova, 2015: 77).

Nevertheless, the fact that young people tend to distance themselves from institutionalised politics should not be regarded as an indicator of their civic passiveness or apathy. There are new forms of civic participation developing rapidly, and Russia is no exception. For instance, a new protest wave (mass protest demonstrations of the spring of 2017 that took place in many regions of the Russian Federation) demonstrates a high level of young people's and even school students' civic engagement. Indeed, the media and state rhetoric have described this protest participation as a serious 'problem', which has given rise to a new moral panic directed at young people. Currently, the main strategy for solving this 'problem' involves 'prohibitive measures' (the prohibition of minors' participation in rallies) and preventive measures within the education system (the cultivation of 'proper citizenship' among school students). This response, it is argued in this report, constitutes a lost opportunity to understand the motivation behind young people's actions and establish communication with them in order to create legitimate platforms and opportunities for their interaction with the authorities – in other words, to increase young people's civic and political engagement.

As demonstrated by a number of studies (see, for example: Sveningsson, 2015; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013; Pilkington and Pollock, 2015; Norris, 2003; Harris *et al.*, 2010), youth civic participation has not so much decreased as shifted to new forms of political and civic expression. This new focus on alternative forms of participation is observed across all age groups, but young people are especially inclined to break away from 'traditional forms of participation' in favour of 'special, contextual and specific activities' (through new social movements, online activity, etc.) (Pirk and Nugin, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2016; Johnson *et al.*, 2016).

Young people's reluctance to participate in formal politics results in the need for a broader definition of the terms 'political' and 'civic', a definition which would include a comprehensive experience of a young person's life and various types of activities aimed at social change. Russian researchers also note that, especially in large cities, young people's participation in public life is triggered by initiatives that they find meaningful, and their engagement takes innovative cultural forms, such as flash mobs, performances, and art activism (Omelchenko and Zhelnina, 2014; Krupets *et al.*, 2017). That being said, innovative forms of youth civic engagement are a relatively new topic for academic discussion and there are to date relatively few in-depth studies especially in the Russian context (Abramov and Zudina, 2010: 7; Lebedeva, 2012: 27; Fedotova, 2016: 82).

In this case study, we focus on exploring innovative forms of youth participation and emerging conflicts faced by young people who openly label their activities as civic or political engagement. We call them 'the new civic activists' because despite the generally negative attitude towards politics, the lack of trust in political institutions and the increased risks associated with one's participation in public rallies, these young people are not afraid to openly take part in various

initiatives. In this way they are becoming a subject of civic and political engagement (in the broader sense of the terms), which entails conflicts with both public authorities and with individuals with a more 'passive' attitude.

Given the versatile and broad nature of civic participation, in this case study we single out two youth communities (subcases), which we consider to be illustrative examples of two politically different forms of civic participation that brings them into conflict with state authorities and each other. The main goal of these communities is to change the existing order in the country, at least in some ways (but including in a political sense). This creates conflictual relations with the state authorities, which try to keep the existing order in place. While both communities share an aim to change society, they seek differing (sometimes opposite) outcomes: while one promotes liberal values and openness in Russian society, the other is oriented towards conservative values, strict regulations and strengthening of Russia.

The first sub-case captures young people with so-called democratic values. They are critical of the current Russian government and they want to change the existing social order – for instance, through a change of regime. On the one hand, they use alternative channels to influence the state authorities and interact with them. On the other hand, they try to change the life in the city and in the society as a whole at the micro level. This subcase is referred to in this report as 'opposition activists'. The second subcase involves young activists from St. Petersburg who are not focused on politics and social order as much but want to preserve the moral order enshrined in the legislation of the Russian Federation. For example, members of these communities opposed smoking and drinking alcohol in public places, which is prohibited in Russian law. They also fight against the advertisement of prostitution and brothels. This is their way of showing interest in civic participation and striving to realise their civic potential. They are referred to here as 'moral order activists'.

Further we will discuss in detail these communities and their relations with different agents of conflict (local residents, police, city authorities, and other state representatives). We will also describe the main actions taken by the group members to promote social change and analyse their views on the efficacy of their actions.

## 2. Methods

The key methods used to collect empirical data within the case study are in-depth biographical interviews with members of youth communities, participant observation and scene mapping. The empirical data were collected by two researchers: one working on the 'opposition activists' subcase and the second working on the 'moral order activists' subcase.<sup>1</sup> The two researchers worked separately but exchanged and discussed their fieldwork and findings in the course of the research.

The empirical base of the study consists of 29 in-depth biographical interviews with 19 men and 10 women aged 18 to 39. Fifteen interviews were conducted with 'opposition activists': four were 18-20 years old (3 men and 1 woman); 10 were 21-30 years old (5 men and 5 women); and 1 man was

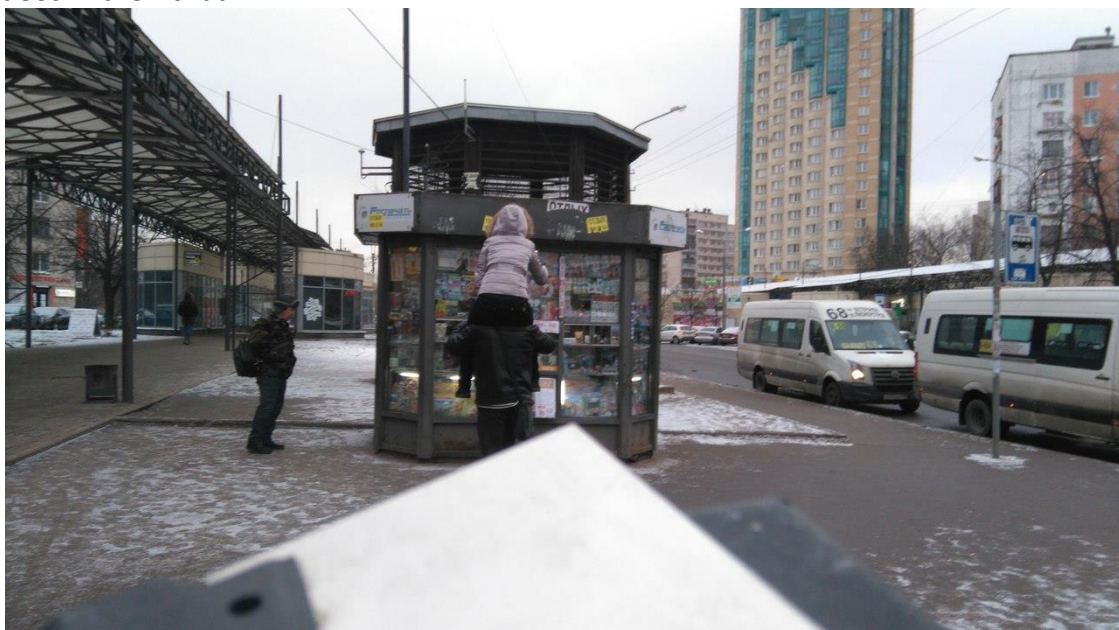
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<sup>1</sup> The researcher who worked with the 'opposition activists' left research and academic work shortly after the field work stage and before the analysis was completed. As a result, the analysis was carried out by another researcher, who worked with audio recordings of the interviews, their transcripts, and research notes from participant observation (the observer did not leave her original field diary entries). The field researcher currently works for an opposition movement in another city, suggesting that she found herself drawn into the field she was studying.

over 30 years old. There were 14 interviews with ‘moral order activists’: one male respondent was 18 – 20 years old; 12 respondents were aged 21–30 (8 men and 4 women); and one male respondent was more than 30 years old. The duration of the interviews ranges from 71 to 248 minutes and the average length was 126 minutes. The interviews were conducted simultaneously with participant observation; the researchers spent 6 months doing field work (from October 2016 to March 2017). The informants were recruited using the ‘snowball’ method at the most high-profile and well-known youth civic organisations and movements, whose activity is covered in the media, including the Internet. It was relatively easy to recruit informants among ‘opposition activists’ due to trust established with the researcher and the researcher’s deep involvement in their activity (participation in events and execution of various tasks alongside other activists). However, it was more difficult to recruit ‘moral order activists’. This was due, on the one hand, to the informants’ limited availability. However, it was also because of a conflict within the community, which grew increasingly intense during the field work period. The presence of a sociologist (who was perceived by most activists as a journalist) only exacerbated the situation and this limited the opportunities for conducting interviews.

Both subcases involve participant observation (about 6 months) as a means of empirical data collection. There are 16 diary entries based on 52 hours of participant observation in the ‘moral order activists’ subcase. Members of both subcases gave their consent for the observation. According to the researcher who worked with the ‘opposition activists’ subcase, she managed to fully engage in the groups’ activities, which allowed her to conduct observations at their meetings and gain access to members-only chats. As for the ‘moral order activists’ subcase, participant observation was carried out at various events, such as clean-up raids targeting sex ads in the streets, raids against people who smoke and drink alcohol in public places, and sporting events organised by the activists 1–3 times a year. Several observation sessions were made at the activists’ meetings, which took place 1–3 times a month.

Diary entries on participant observation within the ‘moral order activists’ subcase are in a free format, but they all include a description of the location, participants and communication. They also cover both offline and online communication. The diaries also include photos (see Plate 1) taken by the researcher (with the consent of community members) or by community members themselves, who usually photograph or film the whole meeting (raid, etc.) and post these photos and videos in their chat.



## Plate 1. Pro-citizen activities - Raid for clear street 25.01.2017

The participant observation method was particularly useful for tracking key figures on the scene. The observation brought to light certain features of the scene that the informants omitted, probably intentionally, in their interviews. The informants' jokes and vocabulary prove to be most telling, as they reveal a different image of the informants and field participants than they chose to show in personal interviews. For example, there was no offensive language in the interviews, and the informants tried to keep it that way at the beginning of the observation. However, after a while this self-imposed ban was lifted, and eventually everyone forgot about it. The observation also noted a gender imbalance in the 'moral order activists' subcase, which presented certain difficulties for the researcher when entering a field where the key participants were young men who, it turned out, were sceptical of sociologists, especially female ones. As noted above, the collection of empirical material coincided with a certain conflict in the activist community, which made it difficult not only to conduct interviews but also to observe the participants.

In addition to their offline activity, researchers continuously monitored the behaviour of group members in social networks, as they are an important resource in the life of the community. The very fact that there are so many online communities and chats demonstrates the scale of both subcases, both inside and outside of St. Petersburg. In the 'opposition activists' subcase, there was complete trust between community members and the researcher, who was granted access to all the relevant chat rooms at the field work stage. However, in the 'moral order activists' subcase, the researcher could access just a few members-only chat rooms.

In the process of collecting empirical material, we encountered ethical problems associated with determining the role of the researcher in the community. This was partially because activists often did not understand that the researcher should remain a researcher and not support the values of the young people or become an activist herself. This 'neutrality' caused a rather negative reaction among the majority of field work participants. There were also dangerous situations connected with clashes at raids; for example, on one occasion, activists were attacked by homeless people during an observation. There were clashes between activists and the police as well. However, despite all the aforementioned difficulties, the researchers were able to collect the necessary empirical material for further analysis.

### 3. Key findings

The space of civic activists in St. Petersburg is very heterogeneous and dynamic, with fluid borders, which may be hard to define, both for the participants themselves and for an external observer. We present the results of the studies of two subcases (the description and the analysis of the two communities) in the form of a comparison, since they have both similarities and differences, and we refer to the two groups as 'opposition activists' and 'moral order activists'.

At first glance, the key difference between the two groups of civic activists is their interests and values. The moral order activists' identity takes root in the confidence that patriarchy is essential for proper moral development, along with a rather aggressive promotion of the idea that the only true duties of women are becoming mothers and housewives, which is reinforced by homophobic behaviour and consumer asceticism. In the context of this narrative, a sober and healthy lifestyle is an axiom; it requires no additional evidence or explanation and the activists are not willing to discuss or change it. The activists employ a variation of the discourse of fighting for the 'traditionally Russian' morality, which they view as being threatened and attacked by 'Western

values'. This, they believe, requires a response from real patriots and civic-minded citizens. The activists from this community avoid discussing other topics – such as politics, the economy, culture, and education – since such issues lie outside the main sphere of the activists' struggle for moral order and discussion of them might lead to disagreement and distract from the key objectives of the movement. Therefore, they prefer to avoid these topics and focus on the struggle against things that violate the moral order (alcohol, nicotine, prostitution, etc.). At the same time, they do not expect assistance from the authorities; indeed they are prepared to take action on their own in order to achieve greater results.

Opposition activists, on the contrary, believe that politics, the economy, culture, and education are top-priority issues. Members of the opposition community are motivated by democratic values in their discussions and activities. They take pride in their involvement in what is happening around them; namely, at the moment, they are not satisfied with the state of society (meaning social and economic problems that people face in everyday life), the work of government agencies, and the detachment of the government from the population. Through their activities, they try to initiate a dialogue with the authorities and they want to be heard. In this sense, they seek to rebuild capacity for political participation.

However, along with different ideologies and goals, the analysis shows a number of fundamental similarities between these two civic youth initiatives, which are discussed below in more detail.

### 3.1 Scene mapping

It is difficult to unequivocally determine which organisations, initiatives and movements are operating and can be attributed to the scene of St. Petersburg civic activists. On the one hand, this has to do with the fact that some initiatives are informal and are not registered anywhere. On the other hand, it is due to the extremely dynamic nature of activists' participation, membership and migration from one organisation/group/initiative to another, which makes it difficult – even for participants in it - to see the boundaries of the scene. In addition, community members often take part in several initiatives at once and simultaneously both offline and online. Therefore, when mapping the activist space, we primarily focus on identifying virtual links that allow us to create a general map of youth civic engagement in St. Petersburg<sup>2</sup>.

The analysis of virtual connections reveals a very important fact: in Figure 1 we see that activists from the two subcases<sup>3</sup>, despite the fact that they (according to their interviews) do not interact in

<sup>2</sup>In order to create this map, we used an information system that works with the social network VKontakte called *VkMiner\_32*. It allows you to determine the number of social network users that follow the same community at the same time. On the final map, lines connecting different initiatives show that any two linked initiatives have a certain number of participants in common. The thicker the line, the more participants follow both public pages at the same time.

<sup>3</sup>The analysis includes the following online communities of 'moral order activists' (blue colour in Figure 1): Lev Against|SPb [*Lev protiv/SPb*] (tobacco), Russian Run! St. Petersburg! [*Russkaya probexhka! Sankt-Peterburg!*] (runspb), Sober Petersburg – UPS [*Trezvy Peterburg – SBNT*] (alcoholspb), Clean Petersburg [*Chisty Peterburg*] (prostitution), World Without Drugs [*Za mir bez narkotikov*] (againstdrug), Union for People's Sobriety • UPS RF [*Soyuz borby za narodnyuyu trezvost • SNBT RF*] (alcohol), Russian Run. Russians for a Healthy Lifestyle! Rus [*Russkiye probezhki. Russkiye za ZOZh! Rus*] (run), Slavic World [*Slavyansky mir*]<sup>3</sup> (world), Zhdanov Vadim Georgievich (zhdanov). The opposition communities include the following (red colour in Figure 1): Youth Movement 'Vesna' [*Molodezhnoye dvizheniye 'Vesna'*] (Vesna), St. Petersburg Human Rights School [*Sankt-Peterburgskaya shkola prav cheloveka (POShPCh)*] (POShPch), Democratic Petersburg [*Demokratichesky Peterburg*] (DemSpb), Parnas Youth Wing [*Molodezhnoye krylo 'Parnasa'*] (PARNAS), Youth Yabloko [*Molodezhnoye Yabloko*] (MolYabloko), creative group {rodina} [*tvorcheskaya gruppy {rodina}*] (Rodina), Open Russia [*Otkrytaya Rossiya*] (Openrussia), Youth Human Rights

the offline space and often oppose themselves to each other, have online connections. This is particularly true of such groups as Open Russia [*Otkrytaya Rossiya*] (opposition) and Slavic Union [*Slavyansky soyuz*] (moral) (296 connections), Civic Union [*Grazhdansky soyuz*] (opposition) and Professor Zhdanov Group [*Gruppa professor Zhdanov*] (moral) (190 connections), Parnas (opposition) and Russian Run [*Russky beg*] (moral) (174 connections), Solidarity [*Solidarnost*] (opposition) and Russian Run [*Russky beg*] (moral) (68 connections); the remaining communities have up to 30 connections between community members and initiatives of the two subcases.

Some participants of this common space are included in the same online groups and monitor each other's activities. They also borrow some methods of self-presentation and activism from one another. Thus, the participants are included in the agenda of each other.

While there are initiatives that belong to just one group of activists, for example, the initiative of 'opposition activists' called the Human Rights School [*Shkola prav cheloveka*] that does not have a single participant in common with the 'moral' subcase, we can see that it is more of an exception in comparison with other initiatives.

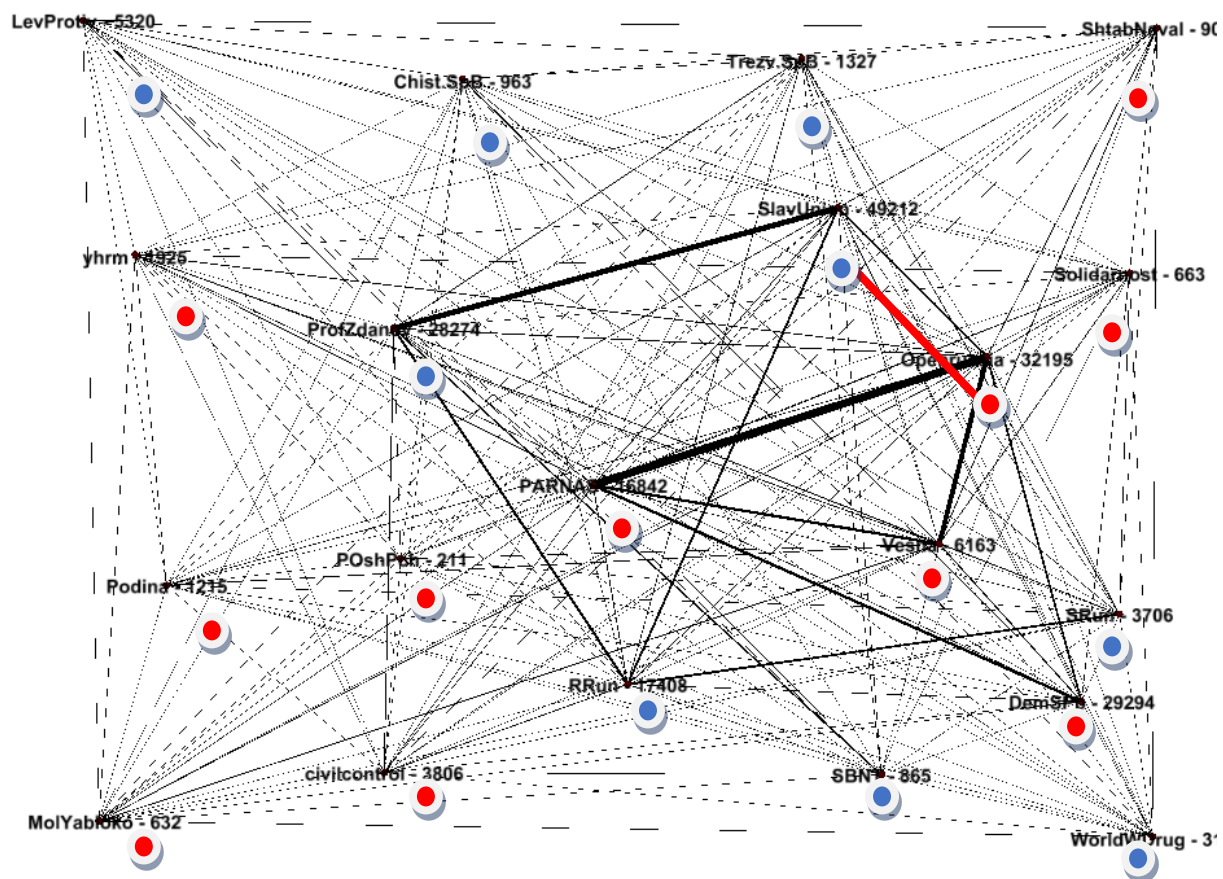


Figure 1. Online map of the new civic activists in St. Petersburg

The strongest links, of course, are formed between communities that belong to the same subcase. For example, the map shows that 'opposition' members of Vesna, Open Russia, and Parnas have more intersections than others (in other words, they follow the same online public pages), thereby

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Movement [*Molodezhnoye Pravoazhchitnoye Dvizheniye*] (yhrm), Civil Control [*Grazhdansky Kontrol*] (civilcontrol), Navalny Headquarters in St. Petersburg [*Shtab Navalnogo v Sankt-Peterburge*] (ShtabNaval), and Solidarity [*Solidarnost*] (Solidarnost).

The names in parentheses are used to label each youth movement on the map.



forming a single community. The strongest links among ‘moral’ activists are formed between nation-wide movements, with the strongest link between Slavic World and Zhdanov – the idol of many activists of this scene. It is followed by the all-Russian Russian Run public page, which has a strong connection with its St. Petersburg branch. We can also see thick lines that connect the community Zhdanov and online communities that advocate a sober lifestyle, both nation-wide and local ones.

In general, it should be noted that such an abundance of (mutual) connections formed by activists’ participation in several initiatives (overlapping groups) proves the existence of so-called structural folds in this field (Balázs and David, 2010), which, on the one hand, can increase the efficiency of various groups’ activities (including borrowing new ideas/practices from each other and redistributing resources) and, on the other hand, can lead to a rather high mobility of participants within the field, with a possible reduction in stability within individual organisations/movements.

### ***3.2 Internal structure of communities. Power struggle or its absence***

As for the organisational structure of communities (based on interviews and observations), it is worth noting that there is an important difference between the two subcases in question. For example, communities of ‘opposition activists’ do not have a rigid internal structure and a set hierarchy: their participants can perform different roles, switch their functions, organise some events and just participate in others. Moreover, such a lack of hierarchy is viewed as a community value, which they try to preserve. At the same time, it is evident that in reality the differentiation of roles and responsibilities results in conflicts associated with the internal competition for status. For example, there are leaders trying to win universal recognition:

N really wants to have authority, and he is [an authority] for a very small group of people, because N does a lot, but he really wants to be a leader – that’s obvious and that’s why it’s repulsive... People who are obsessively trying to be leaders are not so great. (Renata, female, 21 y.o., opposition activists)

However, it is important that, as of now, the field of youth ‘opposition activism’ still preserves its ‘leaderless’ nature. People who try to claim leadership do not receive general support and their claims are called into question. The values of equality and the absence of a hierarchy remain this community’s constitutive principles. Thus, in general, we can observe solidarity in this field.

The subcase of ‘moral order activists’ presents somewhat different principles and practices of self-governance. Here, all the roles and responsibilities are assigned much more clearly, in a rather hierarchical way: there is a leader, assistants and ‘ordinary’ activists. As a rule, this does not lead to conflicts, and the status of a participant depends on the extent to which the activist is ready to ‘invest’ in a group’s activities (attend meetings and raids, distribute information on the Internet, take initiative, organise and participate in events) and take responsibility. The informants’ interviews mention the concept of ‘hot’ and ‘warm’ circles of activists, the former being community leaders, and the latter being ordinary members.

There is a certain group of key members who are responsible for organising, covering and holding events, right? So, sometimes, of course, they are selected from... from... from, so to speak, well, there is this ‘hot’ circle, right, the organisers? And there is a ‘warm’ circle, a ‘warm’ circle of people who constantly come to... to rallies, you know, to demonstrations, to... to jogs, to raids, yeah. They are also doing some kind of social work with them, yeah. “So you want to take part in an event? Here is a small task for

you. Are you done? Are you? Shall we give you another task? Well, great, you are doing just fine. Here is another, and another, and another one.” Because you kind of want to train someone who could replace you because you won't be going to raids forever. (Alex, male, 28 y.o., moral order activists)

The ‘career ladder’ of an ordinary community member is completely transparent and depends mainly on one’s desire to participate in the life of the community. The status of a leader/organiser is viewed as honorable; people are drawn to community leaders and they have great authority.

Despite the different degrees of rigidity in assigning member statuses within the two subcases, it is important to emphasise that both communities are built on the principle of bottom-up self-organisation, and the roles of event organisers and participants are quite interchangeable and can switch from one event to another.

Both subcases also demonstrate a gender-specific nature of community organisation. For example, the subcase of ‘opposition activists’ has an approximately equal number of male and female participants, and they advocate the principle of gender equality. However, leading positions (for example, event coordinators) are usually occupied by men, which is problematised by some participants: ‘Well, I don't think that age is. But gender... It seems to me that it does make a difference in people’s minds. Well, I mean that boys, men – they happen to coordinate things more often’ (Ira, female, 22 y.o., opposition activists). The subcase of ‘moral order activists’ presents the opposite situation in a certain sense; the community is thought of as a masculine one with a dominant patriarchal order, and the number of male participants is much higher than that of female ones. However, if we look at the role distribution in the community, we can see girls in leading positions (4 female event coordinators and movement leaders). At the same time, this situation is not problematised but, rather, justified as an exception to the rules (the rules here are universally understood as the shared principles of patriarchy in the community and the perception of the role of women solely as housewives, etc.).

INT: One of your leaders is [Elena]. A girl.

INF: She is the only girl in the organisation, yes. But it is an exception, naturally, because there are girls like that, yeah. (Ivan, male, 19 y.o., moral order activists)

These examples show an important contradiction and present an interesting issue for further analysis. Why is it is much more difficult for young women to become leaders in the community of ‘opposition activists’, who value gender equality while the opposite is true for the subcase of ‘moral order activists’, where participants support a patriarchal regime but women are allowed to take the lead and are even encouraged to do so?

### **3.3 Online activity**

As mentioned earlier, young people have the opportunity to participate in various communities and initiatives thanks to the widespread online activity of all the aforementioned communities. Civic engagement often starts on the Internet: young people search for news, organisations, like-minded people, and opportunities to take part in certain events, and later, online and offline activities become intertwined. Social networks, communication in chat rooms, writing press releases for events and news coverage – all these are parts of the everyday life of a young activist and they require certain competencies (the ability to write press releases, knowledge of

responsible online behaviour, skills needed to create video content, conduct online discussions, etc.) and resources (first of all, time) in order to increase the efficiency of one's activities.

There are 3 types of online mediums that activists use: (1) open communities; (2) video channels (YouTube) and websites of movements; (3) invitation-only chats. Participant observation shows that the social network VKontakte is the most popular among activists. 'Opposition' activists also like to use Telegram, which, from their point of view, is the most secure means of communication (you can quickly delete a chat with all the sensitive information in it).

The Internet plays several key functions for the representatives of both subcases:

- management - most of the communication and the resolution of many organisational issues takes place online (for example, event planning and discussion, assigning responsibilities, search for participants and their engagement, etc.).
- integration and stratification - activists involved in different initiatives are united by a complex and differentiated network of chats that are designed for different purposes and include different participants. Invitation to a specific chat is a sign of trust, evidence of shared practices and meanings, a means of integration into the community. The rejection of requests to join specific chats, on the other hand, allows young activists to draw a line between 'us' and 'them' and to differentiate individuals in the group of 'us' in terms of their 'proximity' and participation. It is important to note that the Internet also becomes a resource for assessing newcomers – that is to say, deciding whether they share the scene participants' interests and values based on the analysis of a newbie's social network profile. Public representation and promotion - the information about the majority of events and activities is posted on the community's webpage (in social networks and in blogs). Activists also write press releases for the media (primarily local ones), which can publish them online. Different initiatives and s often support each other by reposting relevant information. Informing a wide audience about the latest event online is often considered to be a performance indicator of the event as a whole. In this case, online representation may compete with real offline actions. The Internet acts as a channel for making activists' work 'visible', and this public representation also helps them recruit new community members.
- communication: activists use the Internet to interact not only with each other but also with society. Comments, reposts, and likes become a means of feedback and allow them to communicate with other people, including adults.

It is therefore evident that online communities, blogs and public pages on social networks allow activists to inform people about their goals and activities, to engage new supporters and participants, to discuss topical issues, and to maintain internal and external solidarity. In addition, chats and online communities serve as a means of enlisting the help of activists for both planned and unscheduled events.

### ***3.4 Reasons and ambitions facilitating civic engagement***

In analysing the interviews of our informants, it seemed important to us to understand the reasons why they decide to engage in activism, while a large part of the population prefers to stay away from politics and social change.

The analysis shows that some participants (from both the 'opposition' and the 'moral' subcases) value the process more than the achievement of specific changes in the public and political life. On

the one hand, many informants note that it is impossible to bring about changes here and now, but it is necessary to act today, as today's activity becomes a part of a long, large-scale process whose result can only be seen in the future. On the other hand, the delayed result makes some participants shift their focus from general goals to individual ones, such as professional development and accumulation of capital (social, symbolic, and cultural) for a future career in politics or civil service.

I am planning to get a degree in municipal management, master all the necessary tools, well, I mean, I will have... I will have some sort of an idea, and then I can go and work in municipal administration, having specific tools, you know? I will continue working on making society better. (Elena, female, 22 y.o., moral order activists)

I would have never met some people if I weren't an activist. For instance, members of the Legislative Assembly. I respect them very much; I would vote for them. But I would not have met them in person. And now I have. (Platon, male, 25 y.o., opposition activists' and 'moral order activists')

Such young people may turn activism into their profession, and at some point it may start to generate income or other resources – for example, such activities as educational trips to seminars and schools may be financed in whole or in part by an activist organisation.

Some activists seek to accumulate social capital in the process of activism for a different purpose: social capital becomes necessary for socialization in a new space (for example, for a student who came from another city to St. Petersburg and does not have any acquaintances there). Such young people use civic activism as a way to get to know the new urban space and to enter new communities.

Returning to youth issues, when you feel that you are a part of some movement, of some community, you basically feel more confident... I have friends and those who do nothing, well, they just study or work, and they are more prone to all sorts of depression and pensiveness. (Masha, female, 25 y.o., moral order activists)

This strategy often leads to a person leaving activism, since it loses its meaningful value and is eventually replaced by other life circumstances.

On the other hand, there are participants who believe that the most important part of activism is the opportunity to implement specific social and political changes, which they are trying to achieve here and now.

I am not indifferent to the situation with human rights and civil liberties... People are put in prison, being tortured, and... some are even killed, especially well-known, prominent political figures, due to the fact that the government does not want to be replaced, well, they do not want to leave (Kirill, male, 20 y.o., opposition activists).

Such activists see themselves as 'revolutionaries' and they have a clear idea of how to change the life of the society. The main idea in this case is the struggle against the existing regime/moral order, and the activists' work has a final goal.

I believe in building a civic society from the bottom, and I do not believe in building it, creating it from top to bottom [...]. (Varlam, male, 21 y.o., opposition activists)

It is all up to me; everything depends on my actions. If I don't like some conditions in the country, and I can... and I cannot change them, then I have to either accept them or leave the country. And I don't want to leave, so it means that it is all up to me. So, I am trying to make my environment better. (Egor, male, 29 y.o., moral order activists)

Other community members usually believe that such activists are the most courageous and ready to take action: 'In order to participate in such events, you need much more courage, some bravery... but this would be real'. (Kolya, male, 20 y.o., opposition activists)

To sum up, we can say that the listed types of motivation behind activists' participation in various initiatives are not mutually exclusive and a given activist may be driven by a number of them at the same time. There are also activists who join the community or support initiatives on a case by case basis, for example, when there is a surge of activity or some conflict. A number of people engage in civic action because they are subjectively forced to do so, as they can no longer tolerate what is going on around them. Their activism stems from the inability to remain indifferent, which distinguishes such activists from the rest.

Despite the variety of reasons that can lead a young person to civic engagement, it is worth noting that all activists regularly reflect on their own reasons for entering the community and can always explain the circumstances and reasons for their involvement. Paying attention to yourself and to what is happening around you in an attempt to analyze the situation becomes one of the key skills of an activist.

### ***3.5 Interaction with external actors: the police, 'other' youth and the older generation***

One of the key tasks of the study was to distinguish the agents of conflict encountered by the young people. In this section we will describe the interaction between activists and various people outside of the community, such as the older generation, 'other' young people, the police, and executive authorities.

It is important that, in general, both communities believe that they are not prone to conflicts, either internal or external. They represent themselves as 'unconflicted'; stable links between group participants and common meanings and values shared within the community are indicative of intergroup cohesion. However despite the absence of 'visible conflicts', it is possible to identify lines of tension in the informants' narratives. In our view some of these tensions might be considered as conflict.

#### **3.5.1 Attitude towards 'other' (passive) youth**

First of all, it is worth noting that the communities in question are in a kind of 'opposition' to passive young people. In contrast to them, both groups claim that they have the right to change society. The policy of 'small deeds' can be traced in both subcases, and it is aimed at a final result – a change in the social, political or moral order. In practice, opposing oneself to the passive majority is a way to assert one's own identity and a certain superiority: 'The aspiration for moral ideals is the best. What is the worst is the desire for a consumer lifestyle'. (Egor, male, 29 y.o., moral order activists).

Activists believe that civic engagement should be manifested through dealing with your problems yourself and through helping people around you. Their willingness to go into the street and express their attitude towards an existing social problem is the manifestation of their social engagement and contribution to changing the social system – as opposed to remaining 'armchair warriors'.

I am like a crusader. I have my sins and I, you know... do good in order to cleanse myself from these sins. Well, not really 'do good', not for everyone, but still. For me it's like a way to wash away my sins and show that I can do something, something useful. And it's also about perception [informant's perception of himself]. For example, I used to smoke, but I don't smoke now. (Denis, male, 23 y.o., moral order activists)

Passive youth's lack of recognition of existing problems and their unwillingness to change anything is problematised by activists, who try to call for action, albeit often in vain.

For example, not a single lift in our building works. I'm personally not really affected by that, I can run up the stairs to my third floor, it's fine, but there are 16 floors... I say: 'We need to solve this problem, people.' 'So we will go to the superintendent – what will she do?' Well, at least go and tell her that there are many of you and that you have a problem. Because sure, going up the stairs is fine, but what if someone gets sick or needs to carry stuff? But no, they are all just sitting on their asses. (Lisa2, female, 21 y.o., opposition activists)

At the same time, 'opposition' and 'moral' activists exhibit different behaviour in their interaction with passive youth. Most 'opposition activists' remain neutral and keep their distance in the process of interaction, not trying to impose their point of view and values.

However, young people feel themselves stigmatised by apolitical people, although they try to avoid physical conflicts, this confrontation takes place at the level of discussion.

I think that people who are negative about this, first of all, are the same people who... They are the same people who do not go to vote in the elections, they are the same people who are asked: 'Why don't you vote? And they say, 'What will it change?' That is, they see that someone, some upstart is doing something, and I think that they just think that this is nonsense, that this is nonsense, and they are... this disappointment in everything that is happening, which is sitting, they are projecting on this person. Because they, they think that this person ... Well, any activist get a lot dumped on them... a lot of dirt from people, even those who are, in principle, apolitical. (Lisa, female, 22 y.o., opposition activists)

Activists fighting for moral order try to ensure that the attitudes they promote (a healthy lifestyle and a certain behaviour in public – for example, no smoking and drinking alcohol in public areas, tearing down sex ads, etc.) are heard by 'other' youth and, moreover, they want the 'other' young people themselves to accept these attitudes and promote them among their friends. In this regard, they often run the risk of open conflict, although no such incidents were witnessed during field work.

I can also give an example of my classmates, when I just entered University, there were situations repeated, when I came there, then I was saying, sharing my emotions: yesterday on a run we beat our own possibilities, ran more than I could. That is, ran an hour instead of forty-five minutes. And seeing in their eyes some boredom, that they drank last night, spent time in clubs. That is, hearing in your address, although I'm the oldest of them, who already has a child, something of my own. I, of course, do not put myself above them, but respect should still be. When you hear that you're such a backward person from their lips, but it even sounds strange. That is, when you say: "Come on, come on, come with me to run", "I'm a fool, or something to run?" (Natasha, female, 22 y.o., moral order activists)

In general, both groups of informants note that their opposition to passive youth does not usually result in open conflicts.

### 3.5.2 Interaction with the older generation

The analysis of the activists' attitude towards 'adults' (both those in their immediate environment and strangers) reveals an intergenerational tension, where an average adult is viewed as more 'conservative', 'busy', not willing to 'change' and not supporting youth activism. In this case, activists represent themselves as initiators of change and, among other things, try to overcome the passive nature of the 'older generation'.

As far as I can see, as I communicate with different people, for example, my mother is willing to listen to me. But in general, I see that parents, teachers, well, those who seem to be helping young people, they are very reserved, old-school, stiff; they only see their point of view and, unfortunately, they are not really ready for change. (Ira, female, 22 y.o., opposition activists)

Activists talk about 'verbal conflicts' with the older generation who want to prove their point of view on what is happening in politics. In the following excerpt, Eduard talks about an emotional confrontation with a man who objected to the candidate he was campaigning for because 'he is a Jew':

Well, I say, 'does that make him not a man? What's the problem?' He says: 'He goes every day with Dmitrieva to the US Embassy for tasks.' I say, 'I have two questions.' [I was] all emotional, I could feel my blood starting to boil. 'First of all, what makes you think that? Secondly', I say, 'if you know about that, why didn't you tell anyone anywhere? Why didn't anyone stop them? Why is the FSB not working on it?' He's like, 'Well,' I said, 'Well, who told you?' He says, 'It was on TV.' The same channel that's so good at brainwashing. And I just laughed in his face, still worked up. I said, 'You do know that this is all nonsense?' He said, 'obviously they go there for assignments like the sun going up and going down. You know, they "said" that the sun rises and sets?' I say, 'I know as a geologist that the sun comes and goes.' I said, 'I studied it.' I said, 'Did you study political science? Or, like, work at the KGB? - There's something some kind of thought was... Spying on him?' 'No, I got a Soviet education!' I said, 'Come on, we're done.' I couldn't stand it any longer. I said good-bye to him, very nasty guy. I have come across that sort. (Eduard, male, 25 y.o., opposition activists)

As for the sub-case of 'moral order activists', they say that apart from passive, 'conservative' representatives of the older generation, who often do not understand and accept their activities,

they also meet real opponents, who sometimes present a threat to community members. These are characterized as adults whom activists have to face in the course of their work, for example, those involved in organised prostitution, alcohol and cigarette sellers, etc. Informants say that those of them who take down sex ads receive threats, and those who do it on their own are tracked down and beaten up. Those who fight against unlicensed alcohol sales or selling alcoholic beverages to minors also face retaliation.

### 3.5.3 Interaction with state bodies

The very nature of activism makes it inevitable that representatives of both subcases have to interact with various state authorities and the police. Activists ‘force’ government officials to communicate with them or at least try to make the authorities notice their petitions, complaints, open protests, and public actions: ‘Well, judging by what we do, the authorities do not listen to anyone at all. Until you really force them to do something’. (Ira, female, 22 y.o., opposition activists) The establishment of such communication can be regarded as an independent result of activism.

The need for such interaction demands that activists should have certain competences, which increases the social and cultural capital of the community: knowing the legislation, how to act when taken into custody, and how to write complaints and petitions, as well as the ability to speak the same language with the authorities, as dictated by the rules of bureaucracy. It is important that the community's capital becomes a resource for the development and support of individual activists.

Well, it’s just that I got into [name of an organisation], you know, I got... It was interesting for me, yeah. But it was interesting because I had no idea how to go on a one-man protest in a city where you don’t know anyone, where you call your parents from the police station, and they are sleeping; so that's why I joined [name of an organisation]. (Matvey, male, 21 y.o., opposition activists)

Interaction with the police is regarded by informants as an integral part of activism in the current conditions. Interviews with ‘opposition activists’ clearly show how much this kind of interaction is normalised even in a situation of an open conflict/clash.

Well, you probably have to [interact] with the authorities sometimes... when there are rallies, cops show up, and their idea is that you are doing some nonsense, so they have to come freeze in the cold there... (Renata, female, 21 y.o., opposition activists)

At the same time, being prepared for conflicts with the police becomes a feature of civic engagement that distinguishes movement participants from other young people.

As for the ‘moral order activists’, although this community tends not to trust law enforcement agencies, they try not only to avoid conflicts with the police but also to establish interaction with them

INF: I think, well, it might be generally true, and there is such a thing – well, maybe about 70 percent of brothels simply belong to the police itself. So...

INT: You mean, they said something and the ads were up again? While they were gone.

INF: Yes. Maybe.



INT: But they were so eager to get someone [to get the person who put out the ads].

INF: Well, I only said it so that no one would bother. Because, for some reason, they view what we do as a rally that they have to monitor. And if you say to people that we are being watched, like a demonstration, I was afraid that people would get nervous and leave. Then they called me and asked me to tell them about all our rallies. (Elena, female, 22 y.o., moral order activists)

It is worth noting that young activists' attempts to interact with the authorities (conflicts included) take into account the current legal conditions and opportunities. To do this, they carefully study their own rights and the duties, as well as the rights and duties of authorised persons (e.g. police officers), monitor the updates in the legislation, and many of them even receive legal education.

Thus, we see that conflicts between activists and the police can be solved in different ways. Some activists are ready for an open (physical) confrontation; others try to avoid such kinds of conflict. But both communities do not trust the police and often accuse the authorities of passivity in relation to the violation of the law by the opponents of the activists. For example, members of opposition movements see that police officers are loyal to representatives of the NOD (National Liberal Movement), although NOD activists' actions during protests are largely illegal. Meanwhile, the members of the groups for moral order on each raid observe that the police do not oppose those who smoke in the wrong places, and post sex ads. In fact, as we see from the last quote, members of these groups even suspect the authorities collude with those who advertise prostitution.

## 4. Conclusions

The analysis shows that despite the largely different goals and objectives of the two groups of activists, the scenes of 'opposition' and 'moral' activism not only overlap but have a number of similar features. First, both groups support grassroots initiatives and give non-members opportunities to take part in their events. Second, young activists in both groups sometimes participate in activities of other organisations. Finally, in both cases, each new activist goes through a phase of gaining the community's trust; one of the most important signs of that trust is receiving an invitation to chats/conversations where community members discuss their activities. Online activity is often more important and productive than offline engagement; we can see that the Internet is completely incorporated in the life of activists.

Regardless of what activists are fighting for, they often share common motivation (professional development, capital accumulation, and social change) and oppose the passive majority. Communities are not isolated from each other; on the contrary, they are interested in each other's activities. Activists widely use the media space and creative approaches to present their ideas. They challenge the system and try to change the existing order. However, the two groups of activists have different values and priorities.

Other differences include the groups' internal hierarchy, their modes of interaction with state authorities and the police, and their ultimate goals.

It is especially important to note gender-related contradictions; the activists' values may not always correspond to what is actually happening in their communities. For instance, in the subcase of 'opposition activists', who are fighting for gender equality in society, women are much less

likely to become leaders than male activists while, in the subcase of ‘moral order activists’, who adhere to and promotes patriarchal values, women are allowed to take the lead.

There is also a contradiction in the activists’ attitude towards the authorities. When dividing the case of civic activists into two subcases, we assumed that ‘moral activists’ would be more loyal to the current government, but in reality both groups show a lack of trust towards the current regime in Russia. Moreover, ‘moral’ activists often criticise the government, in a way similar to the behaviour of ‘opposition activists’, who openly declare their lack of trust in the authorities.

Despite the fact that participants assess the effectiveness of their activities differently (some believe that it will only be possible to speak about effectiveness in the future), everyone recognises that it is necessary to act today in order to achieve results in the future. And even ‘small deeds’ are seen to be significant for achieving global goals.

## 5. Future research

The analysis of youth civic engagement in St. Petersburg has revealed several important topics to be researched further, including the use of cross-case analysis.

- 1) *The comparison of activists’ social backgrounds and their paths towards civic engagement.* It would be interesting to compare the role of activism in the life projects of activists, how young people get involved in civic engagement and what their views on the possibility of social change are.
- 2) *Activism as a professional activity and the conversion of received capital into additional resources.* Data analysis shows that civic participation of many activists stems from their desire to accumulate new professional competencies that may be used in making a career later on. We can also see that the boundaries between activism and professional life become blurred and problematized, often by the participants themselves, which results in an opportunity to convert skills and connections acquired in the process of civic engagement into economic capital. A comparison of case studies can help us understand the potential and the limitations of professionalization in different forms and areas of civic engagement.
- 3) *Features, nature and tools of interaction with the state.* The state proves to be a key agent in activism, in the form of specific regulatory bodies, an enemy, or a partner. It is the interaction with the state that often shapes specific features and opportunities for activism in a given field. Activists have to constantly work on their competence in communicating with state authorities and the police. Moreover, activists try to influence not only legislation related to the state’s youth policy, but also other laws, and therefore it is important to identify their means of influence and their impact on the existing legislation.

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## Appendix

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Family status	Ethnicity	Religion
Matvey	Male	21	Currently at university	In full-time education	Living with partner	Russian	No information
Gleb	Male	22	Did not complete university	In full-time employment	No information	Russian. Ukrainian	No information
Platon	Male	25	Completed university	In part-time employment	No information	Russian	Atheist
Eduard	Male	25	Completed university	In full-time employment	Living with partner	Russian	Orthodoxy
Liza	Female	22	Completed university, Currently at 2nd university	In full-time education	No information	Russian	No information
Olesya	Female	23	Completed university	In part-time employment	Single	No information	No information
Tina	Female	18	No information	No information	With partner	No information	Atheist
Renata	Female	21	Currently at university	In part-time employment and part-time education	Single	Russian	No information
Kolya	Male	20	Currently at university	In full-time education	No information	No information	No information
Kirill	Male	20	Currently at university	In full-time education	No information	No information	No information
Lisa2	Female	21	Currently at university	In full-time education	No information	No information	Catholic
Ira	Female	22	Currently at university	In part-time employment and part-time education	No information	No information	No information
Borya	Male	18	Currently at Professional Secondary Education	In full-time education	Married	Russian	No information
Victor	Male	33	Completed university	In full-time employment	No information	Russian	No information
Varlam	Male	21	Completed General Secondary Education	In part-time employment	Single	No information	No information



Elena	Female	22	Did not complete Professional Secondary Education	Unemployed	Married	Russian	Orthodoxy (paganism)
Saveliy	Male	39	Completed university	In full-time employment	Married	Russian	Orthodoxy
Masha	Female	25	Currently at university	In full-time education	Divorced	Russian	Orthodoxy
Igor	Male	27	Completed Professional Secondary Education	In full-time employment	Married	Russian	Orthodoxy
Egor	Male	29	Completed university	In full-time employment	Married	Russian	Orthodoxy
Denis	Male	23	Did not complete university	In full-time employment	Living with partner	Slavonian	Atheist
Arkadiy	Male	21	Currently at university	In full-time education	Single	Russian	Orthodoxy
Alex	Male	28	Completed university	In full-time employment	Single	Russian	No information
Anton	Male	28	Completed Professional Secondary Education, Currently at university	In full-time employment	Single	Russian	Judaism
Vladimir	Male	27	Completed Professional Secondary Education	In part-time employment	Single	Russian	Orthodoxy
Sonya	Female	29	Completed university	In full-time employment	Single	Russian	No information
Sergey	Male	24	Completed university	In full-time employment	Single	Russian. Estonian. German	Atheist
Natasha	Female	22	Currently at Professional Secondary Education	In full-time education	Single	Russian	No information
Ivan	Male	19	Currently at Professional Secondary Education	In full-time education	Living with partner	Russian	Paganism